

FROM MIGRANTS TO MAINSTREAM: A SERIES OF ARTICLES ON THE
TRIANGLE'S EVOLVING LATINO POPULATION

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ABSTRACT

REMY SCALZA: From migrants to mainstream: A series of articles on the Triangle's evolving Latino population
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Since 1990, when the South emerged as a new destination of choice for Latino migrants, North Carolina's Latino population has experienced an unprecedented surge, growing from fewer than 100,000 people to nearly 600,000. During this time, the profile of Latino migrants has undergone a dramatic transformation: from single males seeking temporary employment to families eager to put down roots and start new lives in North Carolina. In the process, Latinos have become a central and lasting feature on North Carolina's cultural landscape. Local media coverage, however, has largely failed to register these changes and continues to portray Latinos as outsiders and, in many cases, the source of problems and inconvenience. Through a series of five newspaper and magazine feature articles, this project seeks to fill some of the gaps in coverage, exploring the complex and often difficult transition from Latino newcomer to settler.

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INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Latino migration has transformed North Carolina's demographic landscape. In 1990-2006, the Latino population grew 678 percent, from 76,726 to 597,382, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (1990; 2006). The most spectacular growth occurred during the 1990s, when the Latino population expanded by more than 500 percent and North Carolina boasted the fastest-growing Latino population in the nation. Today Latinos make up seven percent of the state's residents, or one in every 14 North Carolinians, according to a report from the Kenan Institute at UNC-Chapel Hill (Kasarda & Johnson, 2006, p. 2).

This migration has had a far-reaching impact on economic, social and educational life in North Carolina. Latinos filled one in three new jobs created in the state from 1995 through 2005 and in 2004 had a total economic impact of \$9.2 billion, according to the Kenan report (Kasarda & Johnson, 2006, p. ix). In the classroom, Latino students accounted for more than half of total growth in North Carolina public schools from the 2000-02 to 2004-05 school years (p. ix). Likewise, more Latino babies are being born in the state. Births have increased 11 times over since 1990. In 2006, more than 21,000 births – or one of every six new Tar Heels – was Latino, according to the State Center for Health Statistics (2007).

Behind these indicators lies a profound transformation in the dynamic and composition of the Latino population. The equation of "Latino" with "immigrant" – never quite accurate – is clearly no longer adequate. While North Carolina continues to attract newcomers from Latin America and other states in the U.S., greater numbers of Latinos are born, raised and schooled right here. Families, businesses, homes and elaborate community

networks all show the deep roots sunk into North Carolina's soil. Long viewed as outsiders, the state's Latino population is increasingly here to stay.

Through a series of five newspaper and magazine articles (outlined in detail below), this project will examine the evolving status of the Triangle's Latino population: the complex stages of adaptation to life in North Carolina and the obstacles faced along the way. At the same time, it will explore how Latino migrants are redefining the state and what it means to be a Tar Heel.

Terminology

The identifier "Latino" will be used in this project as an "umbrella ethnic term describing people in the United States who are either themselves from a Spanish-speaking country or whose ancestors were from a Spanish-speaking country" (National Association of Hispanic Journalists, 2002, p. 20). Though "Hispanic" and "Latino" are often used interchangeably, "Hispanic" is controversial among some Latinos who see it as a government-imposed label (p. 20). The U.S. government introduced the term in the 1980 census in order to assess how many people in the U.S. were of Latin-American or Spanish descent. "Latino," on the other hand, is the term that most people from Latin America choose to refer to themselves, when not using a country-specific reference like Mexican or Cuban (p. 10). In this project, "Latino" is used except when quoted sources choose other terminology.

In addition, the terms "migration" and "immigration" are not used interchangeably in this project. In the field of migration studies, "immigration" refers specifically to the "process by which non-nationals move into a country for the purpose of settlement" (International Organization for Migration, 2004, p. 31). "Migration," on the other hand, is

more inclusive and embraces both international and domestic movements (p. 41). This distinction is especially important because 40 percent of Latinos in North Carolina have moved here from another state or jurisdiction in the U.S. (Kasarda & Johnson, 2006, p. 2). Only 38 percent are actually immigrants, having moved from Mexico or another Latin American country. Nonetheless, popular media often use the term “immigrant” to refer to all Latino newcomers (and in some cases *all* Latinos), even those who have moved to North Carolina from other U.S. states. This equation of “Latino” with “foreign-born” only complicates understanding and serving the Latino population. In this project, “migrant” will be used except in instances when the authors cited have chosen other terminology or when “immigrant” is, in fact, the more accurate identifier.

The transformation of the Latino migrant in North Carolina

Research literature from sociologists, anthropologists and geographers shows that Latino migration to the U.S. and North Carolina has recently undergone dramatic shifts. The South has emerged as a favored destination for migrants. Temporary workers living in marginal communities have been replaced by Latino families playing an increasingly visible and important role in Southern communities.

Latino migration is not a new phenomenon in the U.S. By far, the most significant flow of migrants has come from Mexico, and researchers have identified four key phases of Mexican migration (Durand, Massey, & Capoferro, 2005, p. 1). The classic era of open immigration before the restrictive policies of the 1920s was characterized by the free movement of labor and a more open border than exists today (Durand, Massey, & Capoferro, 2005, p. 1). During this time, the border states of Arizona, California, New Mexico and Texas developed into the nation’s Latino core (Furusetth & Smith, 2006, p. 1). A second

wave of Mexican immigration occurred during the Bracero era: 1942-1964. The federal Bracero program brought in Mexican farm workers, primarily to Texas and California, to help with labor shortages during World War II and its aftermath (Durand, Massey, & Capoferro, 2005, p. 8).

Though the Bracero program ended in 1964, demand for unskilled labor remained high, and a period of massive undocumented immigration from Mexico ensued, with California as a primary destination (Durand, Massey, & Capoferro, 2005, p. 9). Finally, in 1986, Congress enacted the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). Designed to curb undocumented immigration, the IRCA would drastically influence the flow of migrants to the Southeast and North Carolina (Furusetth & Smith, 2006, p. 6).

Before the IRCA, Latino migration had been confined mainly to the four border states that some scholars have labeled Mex-America (Arizona, California, Texas and New Mexico), New York City, and isolated destinations in the Northwest and Midwest (Furusetth & Smith, 2006, p. 2). For a complex mix of reasons, post-IRCA – from 1986 to the present – patterns of Latino migration have undergone a profound shift with the South as a new destination of choice. Furusetth and Smith (2006) point out that the provisions of the IRCA itself encouraged the settlement of new areas (p. 6). The IRCA offered amnesty to two groups of undocumented immigrants: those who could prove they lived in the country since 1982, and “specialized agricultural workers” who had spent 90 days laboring in the country during the previous year. In the end, 2.7 million undocumented immigrants were legalized under this program.

As Furusetth and Smith (2006) explain, “No longer facing the risk of detection and deportation, newly legalized Latinos could exercise their right to pursue employment and

residence in any part of the United States” (p. 6). A deterioration of the California economy and increasing anti-immigrant sentiment there resulted in an exodus from the state (Durand, Massey, & Capoferro, 2005, p. 3). The South, with its strong labor market, booming economy and high quality of life, quickly became the new destination of choice for migrants (Furusetth & Smith, 2006, p. 6). The impact was enormous. In 1990-2000, the South’s Latino population more than doubled, from 2.2 million to 4.45 million (p. 4).

Importantly, new waves of migrants to the South differed from their predecessors in significant ways. As Zúñiga and Hernández-León (2005) note, “They are no longer birds of passage but appear to be nesting permanently in their new destinations” (p. xxv). Zúñiga and Hernández-León (2005) point out several key features of post-IRCA migrants that support this idea. First, the new migration is increasingly a family affair (p. xxvii). Migrants are not coming merely to work and save money. They are starting new lives with their families in the U.S. South. Jobs are changing, too, with seasonal agricultural work giving way to more secure, long-term employment in food processing, construction, light manufacturing and fast food (Griffith, 2005, p. 53). At the same time, the accumulated social capital of new migrants – gleaned from past experiences in the U.S. – has enabled them to become incorporated in community life more rapidly and effectively (Zúñiga & Hernández-León, 2005, p. xxvii). In short time, migrants buy homes, start businesses, join community organizations and build a network of alliances within the community.

Finally, for all of these reasons, new migrants are an increasingly visible and central part of Southern towns and cities (Zúñiga & Hernández-León, 2005, p. xxvii). While past Latino migrants labored undetected in rural agriculture, in today’s South “immigrants and residents share multiple social spaces and are building new and distinct notions of

community” (p. xxvii). Griffith (2005) observes that more and more children of Latino migrants are being born in the South, leading to the development of elaborate community networks weaving together migrant and native populations (p. 54). Ultimately, Smith and Furuseth (2006) conclude that this shift of Latinos from temporary migrants to settlers has “fundamentally challenged what it means to be Southern” (p. 191).

Locally, researchers have observed similar transformations at the state level and in North Carolina’s urban hubs. Griffith (2005) notes that Mexican immigration to North Carolina increased markedly following the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (p.55). The state’s expanding economy, particularly its food processing, construction and furniture industries, made it an attractive destination for new migrants. At the same time, newly legalized migrants in the state, granted amnesty under the IRCA, were able to travel more freely, and they spread the word about jobs and opportunities in North Carolina to family back in Mexico (p. 56).

Likewise, temporary immigration under the federal H-2 visa program for guest workers was increasing. The H-2A program – initiated in the 1940s and expanded in the 1980s – allows the hiring of foreign agricultural workers for up to 11 months. North Carolina farmers, facing a shortage of workers because of migration of the local white and African-American population from rural areas to cities, have embraced the program. By 2002, 40 percent of all H-2A workers in the U.S. disembarked in a central processing center in rural Vass, N.C., about 50 miles south of Chapel Hill (Cravey, 2006, p. 221). This rapid expansion of H-2A workers encouraged, in turn, the expansion of undocumented flows of Latinos to North Carolina (p. 221). By the end of the 1990s, the results were profound. During the span of 10 years, the state’s Latino population had increased nearly five times to

378,963 people, giving North Carolina the fastest-growing Latino population in the nation (U.S. Census Bureau 1990; 2000).

Griffith (2005) observes that, just as on the regional level, North Carolina's new Latino migrants were no longer simply temporary workers (p. 58). According to Smith and Furuseth (2006), women and children began to reunite with male partners, families expanded and permanent communities began to spread and grow more visible (p. 193). The settlement of Latino families, in turn, created demand for new businesses and services: transportation and communication (including money transfers to Latin America), Spanish-speaking media, churches, bilingual education, Latino-oriented entertainment and cuisine and childcare (Griffith, 2005, p. 58). In addition, Latino businesses, including *tiendas* – which serve not only as grocery stores but as important gathering places and bulletin boards for the Latino population – helped to revive “abandoned inner cities and rural wastelands” in the state (p. 59).

Within North Carolina, the Triangle region – defined roughly by the three cities of Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill – has been the epicenter of Latino migration. From 1980 through 2000, the Triangle was the fastest-growing Latino metro region in the entire country, with Latino growth of 1,180 percent during that period (Furuseth & Smith, 2006, p. 11). During just the 1990s, the Latino population of Durham, Orange and Wake counties increased 730 percent, 312 percent and 530 percent respectively (U.S. Census Bureau 1990; 2000). In a qualitative analysis of Carrboro's Latino communities, Cravey (2006) explains that migrants have been drawn to the Triangle by the unique combination of manufacturing, poultry processing and construction jobs with service-sector opportunities in hotels, restaurants and landscaping (p. 221).

In his review of migration to North Carolina, Griffith (2005) argues that Latinos will continue to redefine the state's communities and what it means to be a Tar Heel (p. 70). Relatively low levels of immigration enforcement, aggressive recruiting of undocumented immigrants by employers and increasing reliance on the H-2 visa program mean that the migrant population will continue to grow. Latinos could account for 10 to 15 percent of the state's general population by the end of the decade (p. 70). At the same time, communities have begun to reshape themselves in response to these changes. Frazier and Reisinger (2006) note, "the demand for familiar goods and ethnic services results in businesses, signage and other cultural markers . . . that would not look out of place in Mexico or other Latin American nations" (p. 269). The physical landscape of North Carolina, in other words, is being remade in response to Latino migration.

Furthermore, other research has shown how Latinos have transformed central institutions of public life, including schools and the workplace. In a 2005 quantitative analysis, researchers from the Pew Hispanic Center show that between 1990 and 2000 Latino school-age enrollment grew by 322 percent in the "New South," defined as North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Arkansas and Alabama (Kochar, Suro, & Tofoya, p. iv). As of 2007-08, Latino students were anticipated to account for 10 percent of all students in those states (p. iv). Similar changes have occurred in North Carolina. In the 1990-91 school year, only 8,530 Latinos were enrolled in the state's public schools. In 2005-06, that figure had risen to 116,021 – an increase of nearly 1,400 percent (NC Department of Public Instruction, p. 18). The Latino population is also effecting lasting and widespread changes in the state's economy. Kasarda and Johnson (2006) show that Latinos filled one-third of all new jobs in North Carolina in 1995-2005 (p. ix). Latino spending had an impact of \$9.2

billion on North Carolina in 2004, and Latinos contributed \$756 million in taxes to state coffers that year (p. ix).

Finally, the provision of public services, including health care, will also continue to be transformed by Latino migration. Kochar, Suro and Tofoya (2005) note that “as the new migrants grow older and utilize more health services, and as more wives join their husbands . . . leading to more children, the demands they make on public services will increase” (p. ii). North Carolina currently spends \$299 million on health care for Latinos, and that figure continues to rise (Kasarda & Johnson, 2006, p. ix).

In the past 20 years, then, Latino migration – and the profile of the Latino Southerner – has undergone a radical evolution. Economic opportunities and legal reforms have opened up the South as the new destination of choice for Latino migrants. No longer simply temporary workers, these migrants are increasingly here to stay – a visible and integral part of both rural and urban communities. North Carolina, and the Triangle region in particular, have seen some of the most dramatic changes. As the Latino population continues to grow and interact with local communities – in schools, businesses and other settings – the very definition of what it means to be a Tar Heel has begun to shift. Furuseth and Smith (2006) offer a sweeping summation of the impact: “[T]he story of Latinos in the South has been rewritten, and a recurring theme in the region’s cities and rural communities is one of settlement, permanence and the *transformation* of place” (emphasis mine) (p. 1). Among North Carolina’s Latino migrants, a broad transition from temporary sojourners to settlers is in full swing. These changes will continue to reconfigure life and culture in the state for years to come.

Representations of Latinos in the media

By and large, however, the changing roles and growing importance of the Latino population has not been registered in popular media coverage. Both nationally and at the state level, Latinos continue to be frequently portrayed as outsiders and troublemakers: a transient, nearly invisible population that lives on the margins of mainstream life and is a source of crime, inconvenience and trepidation. The dramatic evolution of the Latino migrant, in other words, has gone largely unnoticed in the media.

On the rare occasions when Latino news is covered in the media, Latinos are portrayed negatively and constructed as passive objects. A 1994 National Council de La Raza study notes that portrayals of Latinos tend to lean toward two extremes. On one hand, a dearth of Latino sources in stories creates the impression that Latinos are not “subjects” who have an authoritative or legitimate perspective to share (Navarette & Kamasaki, p. 5). Alternately, the study found that Latinos are presented as “problem people,” i.e., criminals in gangs, illegal intruders and, in general, a headache for “Anglo” society (p. 8).

A 2006 National Association of Hispanic Journalists’ report largely echoes these findings, noting that while Latinos are increasingly featured in a diversity of story contexts, they are rarely quoted and, on the whole, remain “invisible” (Montalvo & Torres, p. 4). According to the report, undocumented immigrants are typically shown disrupting traditional neighborhoods and acting as a “nuisance and a drain” on the community. These stories tend to picture groups of day laborers milling around and include quotes from complaining residents (Montalvo & Torres, 2006, p. 14).

Academic research has largely backed up these findings. A series of studies has shown that the dominant metaphors used in popular media to describe Latinos migrants are negative and threatening. In a 1999 rhetorical analysis of Los Angeles Times immigration

coverage, UCLA sociolinguist Otto Santa Ana found that the dominant immigrant metaphor used was immigrants as animals: sub-human creatures “to be lured, pitted or baited” (p. 200). Immigrant animals, Santa Ana explains, are ranked below citizens, unable to participate in the community or to be endowed with rights and privileges (p. 202). Likewise, immigrants are portrayed as debased people: as criminals, as mere commodities and sometimes even as weeds to be pulled out (p. 199). Other metaphors present immigrants as a disease and as dangerous waters, threatening to flood the U.S. (p. 199). Mass communication researcher Melissa Johnson’s (2003) content analysis of network news coverage of Mexican immigration shows similar results. Immigration is presented as a problem in many stories, which often verbalize and visualize immigrants as a group and represent them with a flood metaphor (p. 18). In a familiar pattern, immigrants are also shown to be passive. According to Johnson, early footage is “replete with images of Mexican immigrants quietly filing into border patrol vehicles or patiently standing with their hands above their heads” (p. 17). This image of passivity is reinforced by an absence of immigrant sources: U.S. voices speak about Mexican immigration three times more often than Mexicans do (p. 13).

Local coverage in North Carolina has also tended to follow these patterns, often showing Latinos as problem people, peripheral to the larger community and unable to participate fully in civic, economic and social life. Media researcher Lucila Vargas has observed that Raleigh’s News & Observer represents Latinos in a way that is passive and feminine (2000, p. 266). A disproportionate presence of Latina women in stories, a high percentage of female bylines, a preference for soft news (health, education, etc.) over hard news (business, politics, etc.) and a general failure to construct Latinos as authorities all

contribute to the typing of Latino news as “womanish” (p. 276). As a consequence, Vargas explains, those qualities that Western culture often attributes to women – helplessness, submissiveness, etc. – become associated with the Latino population at large. Confirming earlier research, Vargas also concludes that Latinos are overwhelmingly cast as rural farm workers, passive and victimized, and are consistently represented as being illegal (p. 279-82).

A 2006 content analysis of Charlotte Observer coverage of Latinos by sociologists Heather Smith and Owen Furuseth shows that media representations are increasingly incompatible with migrant realities. Coverage shows Latinos as overwhelmingly young, male Mexicans, while – in fact – more and more families are settling in the area and putting down roots (p. 195). Likewise coverage shows migrants to be transnational and undocumented, ignoring the huge flow of legal Latinos from the American Southwest and other areas (p. 195). Finally, migrants are shown to live in isolated and homogeneous *barrios*, even though Latinos have settled in heterogeneous neighborhoods throughout much of Charlotte (p. 195). The theme of Latinos as criminal outsiders is also prominent. “The mythological Latino community seems to be taking on sinister dimensions,” Smith and Furuseth note, and are “frequently portrayed as gang members or as incorrigible drunken drivers” (p. 194).

Finally, to get a sense of the way that Latinos have been covered locally, a supplemental survey of North Carolina’s two largest newspapers – The Charlotte Observer and The News & Observer – was performed by this writer. Articles containing the keywords “Hispanic” and “immigrant” from the last five years were looked at, with the aim of identifying major themes and gaps in coverage of Latinos. In total, 740 articles were analyzed. The results of this survey – which is intended to be a descriptive exercise, not a

rigorous content analysis – are included in an appendix to this thesis. Overall, coverage conformed to patterns in the existing research. Latinos were shown primarily as problems, bringing criminality and an alien culture to the region and, in the aggregate, straining the state's economy and public services. In addition, immigration was viewed as a political problem, rather than a personal issue experienced by a growing number of Triangle Latinos. Last, few stories acknowledged the deep and permanent ways that migrants are rewriting life and culture in North Carolina.

As a review of the research shows, then, Latino migrants tend to be represented in certain, limited contexts: as problems, as outsiders and as passive or helpless. Locally, media coverage has yet to reconcile the permanent and increasingly prominent place of Latino families in North Carolina, often sticking instead to dated and inaccurate characterizations of migrants as temporary workers isolated from the community at large. In the end, few stories transcend these prevailing characterizations to illuminate how migrants have grown more and more central to North Carolina life and how local and Latino cultures have been transformed as a result.

Filling the gaps

Understanding this process of culture change – how it occurs and how to write about it – requires examining the literature from anthropology and sociology on cross-cultural adaptation. In “Adapting to an Unfamiliar Culture,” anthropologist Young Yun Kim explains that adaptation and cultural change are an almost inevitable outcome of prolonged contact between cultures (2003). “[A]mple evidence exists to demonstrate that individuals of minority cultural backgrounds do undergo change over time and across generation,” Kim notes (p. 253). “Some form of new learning, accommodation, internalization and

convergence occurs among those who remain . . . in the host environment” (p. 253). While this transformation may be a given, in the context of newspaper coverage of Latino migration it has largely been ignored. Though the most dramatic surge in migration occurred during the 1990s, and many Latino migrants have spent much of their lives in North Carolina, migrants continue to be portrayed primarily as outsiders.

Newspaper coverage, in other words, has lagged woefully behind the stages of cultural learning experienced by the Latino migrant community. Cultural anthropologists have noted that migrants and newcomers pass through distinct phases after arriving in a new environment. Researcher Kim has suggested a model where successive waves of adaptation are triggered by new stresses encountered in the new culture (2003, p. 258). This dialectic between stress and adaptation leads to personal growth and continued psychological adaptation. Though this transformation is not inevitable, it is generally upward-moving and linear over time. In other words, migrants gradually learn to understand and participate in the new cultural environment, acquiring language skills and adopting the customs of the host culture. Yet, as shown in the analysis of newspaper content, most coverage today inaccurately portrays Latino migrants as locked within their own culture: unable or unwilling to “become” North Carolinian.

Also missing from coverage is an acknowledgement of the complex mix of personal and societal factors that act on Latino migrants in their gradual transition to a new lifestyle in the U.S. Kim notes that adaptation to a new culture is a delicate negotiation where language skills, the host environment and the new migrant’s own background interact to either facilitate or impede “intercultural transformation” (2003, p. 252) By focusing mainly on immigrants as “problems,” as outsiders threatening an existing way of life and as passive

victims of abuse, newspaper coverage obscures the intermediate status of many Latino immigrants. Ironically, this rarely explored in-between phase of cultural negotiation – slowly adapting in the face of language difficulties and a hostile environment that equates Latino with illegal – is where many of North Carolina’s Latinos find themselves today.

Finally, researchers have argued that the process of cross-cultural adaptation is a two-way street. Postmodern scholars have challenged the idea that host cultures simply absorb minority cultures without being changed in turn. In this analysis, new immigrants are not simply assimilated into mainstream culture. They actively reconfigure it into something different. Using the concept of “transculturation,” anthropologist Charles Stewart explains that all cultures change in a situation of contact, losing some elements and acquiring others in a process of constant flux (1999, p. 48). Similarly, anthropologist Nestor García Canclini argues that cultures are inherently hybrid, a product of “permanent crossings and mixtures” (Fischman, 1997, p. 483).

The massive influx of migrants into North Carolina over the past 20 years has initiated precisely this kind of cultural blending and reconfiguration. As shown in research, Latino migrants are not only adapting to life here but are actively rewriting language, religion, food and other elements of local culture. This emerging hybrid, however, has yet to be widely acknowledged in the popular media. As the analysis above shows, local newspaper coverage clings mainly to a simplified picture of U.S. culture as a melting pot that fuses distinct elements into a homogeneous and decidedly American end product. In this vision, Latinos are positioned outside and apart from North Carolina’s culture, waiting to be absorbed. Yet, as anthropologists Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan write in the preface to their seminal work *Beyond the melting pot*, “the problem with the melting pot . . . is that it

did not happen” (1963, p. ix). In fact, North Carolina’s Latino population is already an integral part of the state’s culture, actively and continually redefining what it means to be a Tar Heel.

A review of the literature, then, reveals limitations in existing coverage of the Latino migrant population in North Carolina and ways to correct these limitations. Quantitative and qualitative research from sociologists, anthropologists and geographers has shown that patterns of Latino migration have changed, with the South and North Carolina as key new destinations for Latinos interested in putting down roots and building lives. Mass communication research shows that representations in the media, however, offer an outdated and flawed picture of this migrant population: as outsiders seeking temporary work and as an alien threat on the periphery of mainstream society. Finally, literature from anthropology and sociology helps to shed light on those aspects of the Latino migrant experience that are overlooked: namely, the complex ways migrants respond and adapt to a new environment and, at the same time, remake the local culture. This project aims to focus on these aspects of Latino migration in the Triangle, filling in some of the gaps identified in existing coverage.

Methodology

This project examines the transition of the Triangle’s Latino population from newcomers to a lasting and central feature in North Carolina’s cultural landscape. The focus is on Latino communities in the Triangle, though many of the changes and challenges documented are occurring throughout the state. Through a series of newspaper and magazine feature articles, the project aims to provide a snapshot of migrants’ changing attitudes toward building a life in the U.S., efforts to engage more fully in life in North Carolina and obstacles

faced along the way. At the same time, the project offers a glimpse of the ways the Latino population is reconfiguring the state, its people and what it means to be North Carolinian.

All of the articles focus on individual subjects to illustrate larger trends both in the Triangle and across the state. In contrast to much of the existing coverage, these stories seek to present an intimate and personal view of migrant life in North Carolina. They are mainly built around Latino voices narrating their own experiences, rather than authorities from government and academics commenting on the Latino condition. Likewise, these articles seek to represent Latino individuals not as strangers or outsiders, but as North Carolinians seeking ways to support families and, in some cases, build lives here.

The research for these stories consists primarily of interviews with Latino migrants, both documented and undocumented, national and transnational. One obstacle to previous coverage has been the language barrier. To ensure that Latino voices are heard, interviews have been conducted in Spanish whenever necessary. Interviews have also been used to gather information from some of the people and institutions that are evolving alongside North Carolina's Latino population: advocacy groups, schools, hospitals and local families.

The primary interview format used is the journalistic, in-depth interview. This information-gathering instrument is adapted from the qualitative communication research tradition. Several important characteristics distinguish the in-depth interview from other forms: 1) Questions are open-ended, encouraging respondents to freely express their experiences; 2) The format is semi-structured, with some pre-planned questions and other questions generated spontaneously based on respondent answers; and 3) The tone of the interview aspires to be conversational, "with the form and feel of talk between friends" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 171). This type of interview enables the researcher to move

beyond merely gathering dates, numbers and isolated facts to, instead, understanding a situation in a way that is “close to the way it appears to the people themselves” (p. 134).

Interviewing has also been supplemented by participant observation, another tool borrowed from qualitative communication research. Participant observation is defined as “experiencing and recording events in social settings” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 171). Just as important as answers to interview questions are observations about how respondents interact with the people and objects in their social settings. In this project, observing an immigrant family at dinner or the interactions of children at a Spanish language day care or the work environment in a busy hospital has contributed to a better understanding of the stories and the issues involved. Ultimately, “having been there” – having witnessed how the stories’ subjects live and interact – helps validate and “unpack” the interview content.

Quantitative data is used to supplement interviews and offer a broader view of the ways that North Carolina and its Latino population are changing. Sources on national trends include the Pew Hispanic Center (which bills itself as “the most up to date compilation of statistics on the Latino and foreign-born populations in the United States”) and the U.S. Census Bureau. For the local angle, a range of sources are used, including a landmark 2006 report from UNC-Chapel Hill on Latino economic impact. Other sources include the Carolina Poll (a yearly opinion survey conducted by UNC-Chapel Hill researchers), data from the State Center for Health Statistics and enrollment figures from North Carolina’s public schools.

Importantly, all of this data – and the articles crafted from it – reflect my own biases, as a white, middle class graduate student with a unique set of views about immigration issues. First, my position as a researcher, and in many ways an authority figure, likely

influenced the kinds of answers received from the people I interviewed, many of whom were undocumented immigrants. I tried to offset this power imbalance whenever possible by speaking in Spanish and by spending enough time with respondents to earn a degree of trust. At the same time, my personal experiences and views factored significantly into my choice of articles. I lived in Latin America for three years and – in certain ways – experienced the challenges and frustrations of being an immigrant and outsider. Because of these experiences, I chose to write articles that humanized the migrant experience – showing Latino migrants not as exotic or foreign but as people facing familiar challenges – and to highlight the universal stories of ambition, uncertainty and transformation that are often overlooked in the politicized debate over immigration.

Finally, an underlying motivation behind the project is to work toward a new model of media coverage of the Latino population. As North Carolina’s Latino population changes, so must the kinds of articles being written about it and the kinds of questions being posed. Rather than simply asking how *they* impact *us*, the new challenge taken up in this project is to show how *they* are *us*: to highlight how North Carolina’s culture and Latino culture are increasingly intermingled and interdependent; to humanize the struggles of the Latino population, turning *their* problems, obstacles and injustices into *ours*.

Chapter Breakdown

The thesis is divided into five feature articles, each focused on a different aspect of the transition from new migrants to mainstream.

- ❖ The first article is a 2,100-word newspaper feature examining the complexities and contradictions of “temporary” migration: those workers who come to the area to save money and ultimately plan to return home to Latin America. Though

intentions may be clear, these workers often discover that going home is not so easy.

- ❖ The second article is a 1,500-word newspaper feature exploring a problem faced by growing numbers of undocumented high school graduates: gaining access to a college education. It interweaves one student's efforts to get into and pay for college with an examination of the state's current policy of charging undocumented immigrants out-of-state tuition rates.
- ❖ The third article is a 5,000-word magazine feature offering an in-depth profile of an undocumented immigrant family and their efforts to build a life and a home in North Carolina. This article highlights the obstacles facing undocumented immigrants seeking access to schools, jobs and opportunities for advancement in North Carolina. At the same time, it shows the gradual process by which ties to the home country are severed and new roots laid down in the U.S.
- ❖ The fourth article is a 2,100-word newspaper feature looking at the rising numbers of Latino births in North Carolina's hospitals. Today's record numbers of Latino babies are tomorrow's Tar Heels. UNC Hospitals' adaptations to a changing patient population demonstrate one way North Carolina is embracing the Latino population and evolving with it.
- ❖ The fifth article is a 1,250-word newspaper feature examining one sign that Latino culture is rewriting norms and expectations in North Carolina: the growth of Spanish-language day care centers across the Triangle. While some communities in the U.S. have tried to impose English-only ordinances, many parents here are enrolling their toddlers in all-day, immersive Spanish classes in

recognition of the growing importance of the language in everyday life in North Carolina.

Limitations

Because this is primarily a journalistic work, and not a research project, its limitations need to be evaluated by professional, rather than academic, standards. One significant limitation is the reliance on self-reports given by the people interviewed for the stories. Wherever possible, claims made by interviewees were crosschecked by interviewing other sources and/or examining published reports and articles. For instance, one interviewee – Laura Wenzel, director of a non-profit Latino teen radio station – remarked that many undocumented students could not attend college because they were required to pay out-of-state tuition rates at community colleges and state universities. This statement was verified by 1) consulting with El Pueblo, a Latino advocacy group, 2) interviewing N.C. Rep. Rick Glazier, who worked on legislation to reform tuition laws in the state, 3) speaking with undocumented students and 4) getting tuition cost data from the UNC-Chapel Hill Web site.

In other cases, however, it was not possible to crosscheck self-reports. One Colombian family's descriptions of political persecution in their native country, for instance, could not be readily verified. Confirming details of events that took place nearly 40 years ago and thousands of miles away proved exceedingly difficult. In many cases, however, an individual's own interpretation of events was just as "real," significant and valuable as an objective or independently-verified account. For instance, one undocumented student remarked that she had no support in high school during the college application process. Her perception – for the purposes of this project – is just as important as whether or not there were guidance services technically available to her.

Another limitation concerns my ability to understand and interpret the interview and observation data collected. As Lindlof and Taylor note in their explanation of the limits of the interviewing technique, because the observer's "contact with an informant is so brief and perhaps superficial, he [or she] is more likely . . . to misunderstand the informant, and to be misunderstood by him [or her]" (2002, p. 134). This risk is especially significant in this project because I am interacting with cultures and systems of meaning making – migrant culture, Mexican culture, Latino culture, refugee culture, etc. – so distinct from my own. However, because I was able to spend – in some cases – months with the people I interviewed, I hope to have understood and represented "the indigenous world close to the way it appears to the people themselves" (p. 134).

Finally, the focus of this project is limited to the Triangle: Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill. Many of the demographic transformations in the Triangle are also happening across the state. But the Triangle is unique in the phenomenal rate of growth of the Latino population. Since 2000, for instance, Wake County has experienced the second-largest net Latino growth in the state, and 14.6 percent of the state's Latinos reside in just Durham and Wake counties (Kasarda & Johnson, 2006, p. 5). In addition, the decision to focus on the Triangle is a practical one. Covering Latino communities over the past two years has enabled me to develop a network of ties with individuals and advocacy groups. These bonds are an essential prerequisite to gaining access to migrants and forging the kind of trust needed for in-depth, candid interviewing.

CHAPTER I

Market: The Herald Sun
The News & Observer

Approx. 2,100 words

Not all Triangle immigrants plan to stay

His life has all the makings of an American success story. Twelve years ago, Max left Mexico and set out for the U.S., lured by stories of easy money in the Carolinas. Though one of his first jobs was in the fields – picking tobacco for 11 hours a day – Max’s fortunes improved.

Today, at 40, Max – who requested his last name not be used – holds down a good job on an assembly line in Durham. He has made enough money to enroll his daughters in college back in Mexico. And after years of night classes, his English is finally coming around.

From humble beginnings, Max seems poised to reach out and grab his share of the American dream. There’s only one problem. He doesn’t want it.

“I consider myself Mexican,” he explains. “My priority is that my kids finish school.

“After that, I’ll be going home.”

Max’s story is hardly unusual. In contrast to earlier waves of immigration to the U.S. – those great turn-of-the-century exoduses from the old continent – today’s immigration is often temporary. A conservative estimate from the Pew Hispanic Center reports that more than one-quarter of new Latino immigrants expect to leave the U.S. in less than five years.

Conversations with some recent Latino immigrants in the Triangle – construction workers, office cleaners and landscapers – suggest that locally this figure may be even higher.

Among area immigrants, ties to the homeland often remain strong. Some send money to family back home. Others visit whenever they can. And many – just like Max – dream of one day going back for good.

Still going home often proves easier said than done.

Why immigrants come

Understanding the immigrant backflow starts with considering what draws newcomers here in the first place. Jobs in Latin America can be scarce and wages paltry, compared to earnings in the U.S.

“In factories just inside the Mexican border, people are working for literally \$1 to \$2 dollars a day,” says Marisol Jimenez-McGee, advocacy director at El Pueblo, a Latino-rights group in Raleigh.

In North Carolina, by contrast, the average wage for a Latino factory worker is \$24,391 per year, or nearly \$100 per day, according to a report from UNC-Chapel Hill’s Kenan Institute. Even the meager wages of farm workers, around \$14,000 per year, seem plush in comparison to Mexican earnings.

At the same time, the South, with its booming economy and lax immigration enforcement, has emerged as a new destination of choice for immigrants from abroad and for migrants resettling from California and other traditional Latino centers in the Southwest.

Higher pay plus a steady demand for labor have combined to make North Carolina a magnet for immigrants. Since 1970, the Latino population has increased more than 1,300

percent, from 44,000 to 600,913 people. And from 1980-2000 the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill Triangle was the fastest-growing Latino metro region in the entire country.

Most new immigrants find ready employment in construction, agriculture and hospitality. Indeed, Latinos filled one out of every three new jobs in North Carolina from 1995 to 2005, according to the Kenan Institute report.

Felix, a 27-year-old laborer from Durham, fits the profile of the new Latino immigrant. Broad-shouldered but soft-spoken, Felix emigrated from Mexico four years ago to join two brothers living in North Carolina. He quickly found work building houses – joining a construction labor force in the state that is nearly one-third Latino. It's hard work but worth the sacrifice, he says.

"I left Mexico because I didn't have any chance of getting ahead," he says. "Here they give you more opportunities to get what you want or give it to your family."

Like many immigrants, however, Felix says he plans to return home soon.

"I would like to stay here for another two years," he says, "Then I would like to go back to Mexico."

Among immigrants in the Triangle this attitude is common, explains Ben Balderas, executive director of El Centro Latino, a Latino community center in Carrboro.

"They see themselves as temporary," Balderas says, "They want to save up enough money and then move back home."

Attracted by good jobs and good pay, immigrants from Latin America often approach time spent in the U.S. as an investment – a short-term sacrifice they hope will pay off in the form of a better life down the road in their home countries.

“Everything they do is for economic reasons,” says Diego Torres, a counselor at El Centro Latino. “They do not want to be here just because it’s nice. In fact, they don’t think it’s that nice.”

Far from home

For new immigrants, adapting to life in North Carolina is rarely easy. Jimenez-McGee of El Pueblo notes that Latinos face constant discrimination. Born in the U.S. of Mexican and Irish parents, she recalls one instance when a local official questioned her own background:

“He asked me, ‘Did you crawl over the border or come here in the back of a truck?’ I don’t even think the guy realized he was offending me.”

Survey data echo her assessment. Nationwide, 48 percent of Americans see immigrants as a threat to traditional values, while 53 percent think illegal immigrants should be deported, according to a 2006 Pew Hispanic Center poll.

The surge in the Latino population has generated a strong backlash in North Carolina as well. In a 2006 survey conducted by UNC-Chapel Hill, 40 percent of respondents said Latino migrants are bad for the state, and only 6 percent wanted Latinos in their neighborhood.

North Carolina’s 270,000 undocumented immigrants face added resistance. At the state level, pressure is building to limit access to certain social services.

Undocumented immigrants are already ineligible for in-state tuition rates at universities. Obtaining a driver’s license is virtually impossible without a Social Security number. And sheriff’s departments across the state, including in nearby Alamance County,

have started probing the immigration status of people stopped for unrelated offenses, like speeding.

“It’s the idea of attrition,” Jimenez-McGee of El Pueblo says. “You remove every social safety net from undocumented communities. You make it impossible for them to survive so that they’ll self-deport or stop coming.”

Apart from hostility here, new immigrants also struggle with being apart from friends and family. The flow of Latino immigrants to the U.S. consists disproportionately of single adult males, according to a 2006 Pew Hispanic Center report. While more families have begun to settle, in North Carolina men have accounted for three-fifths of all new immigrants since 1995.

Many have left behind wives and children in search of better opportunities. Max, the assembly line worker from Durham, left a wife and two daughters in Mexico when he came to North Carolina in 1995. Though willing to make the sacrifice to fund his children’s education, Max says being apart has taken a toll.

“My one daughter is a teacher and the other one is still in school, but I hardly know them,” he says.

Staying connected

Facing an uncertain future in their adopted country, immigrants often keep up strong connections with family back home. For many, the most important bond with the home country is monetary: remittances sent to loved ones left behind. The total remittance flow from the U.S. to Latin America exceeded \$45 billion in 2006, according to the Inter-American Development Bank, up 51 percent from just two years earlier.

In North Carolina, millions of dollars are sent back to Latin America every day. On pay days, lines form in area Western Union offices and in grocery stores that offer money-transfer services. Immigrants, many still in their work clothes, slide wads of cash across the counter and list names and addresses of recipients in distant countries. Last year alone, North Carolina immigrants sent back more than \$1.2 billion, or roughly \$3,200 per adult.

Felix, the construction worker from Durham, estimates that he sends about 25 percent of his wages home every month. In his case, the money not only supports family but also helps lay the foundations – literally – for his own future in Mexico.

“I already had two houses built in Mexico during the time I’ve been working here,” he says. “I’m building another one now.”

Back home, the impact is enormous. After oil exports, remittances constitute Mexico’s largest source of foreign income, totaling more than \$23 billion in 2006, according to U.S. Federal Reserve figures. A recent Pew Hispanic Center report showed that nearly one-fifth of all adults in Mexico receive money sent from the U.S.

For some, however, sending money is not enough. In spite of the expense and difficulty involved, many immigrants – including some in the U.S. illegally – find ways to travel back home. Some make trips to visit ailing family or attend funerals. Others undertake the journey more regularly.

“A lot of the people I know go home for Christmas,” Torres says.

Finding a way back to Latin America is rarely a problem. Those who can afford the airfare fly. Cheaper routes are also available.

“There’s a direct bus from Durham to Mexico City,” says Torres, pulling out a bus schedule from his desk. “It costs \$254.”

For immigrants here illegally, it is the return trip to the U.S. that poses a challenge. Many make their way across the U.S.-Mexico border on foot, often with the help of paid guides or “*coyotes*.” These services, however, do not come cheap.

“It normally costs around \$3,000 to get back in,” Torres says, conferring with a client from Mexico who has made the crossing recently. “I knew a woman who had to get a loan on her house just to get money to cross.”

“I want to stay”

This nomadic lifestyle can also exact a high cost in other ways. Frequent travel back and forth creates a sense of rootlessness, and nostalgia for the home country can complicate integration into U.S. society. Felix, bent on returning to Mexico, admits he’s reluctant to adapt to life here.

“One day I will go back to my country,” he says, “so it’s important to keep my culture.”

At the same time, however, the daily realities of life in the U.S. – jobs, relationships and finances – complicate going back. Plans to return after just a few years often end up postponed and sometimes abandoned altogether.

“The principal idea is to work for a short time, save money and go home,” says Torres, the counselor at El Centro Latino. “Sometimes this short time becomes a long time.”

During his 12 years here, Max – the assembly line worker – has started a new family. Though he sends money to Mexico to support his daughters’ college education, he also has children who were born and grew up in North Carolina. New family and financial obligations make it harder for immigrants to return home, Torres says.

“One client in total has 11 children, here and in Mexico,” Torres says. “He’s working three different jobs to send money home.

“His wife in Mexico knows,” Torres explains. “He told me, ‘The only thing she wants from me is a check every month.’”

This tendency to extend stays in the U.S. and even put down roots forms part of a broader change in patterns of Latino settlement across North Carolina and the South. While men do continue to immigrate alone, women and children are reuniting with male partners in growing numbers.

With the growth of Latino families, permanent communities have emerged in place of more transient settlements. For many immigrants, the prospect of one day going home is proving more and more unlikely.

Julia, a 24-year-old housekeeper from Mexico living in Durham, is optimistic. With a new baby boy, she’s dedicated to making life work in the U.S. But her investment is pragmatic, not emotional.

“We live in this country, and we need to adapt to a different culture and different traditions,” she says. “I want to return to my country, but I can adapt here for the time I want to stay here.”

Still, Julia admits that her plans have evolved since she arrived.

“I wanted to come here for a year-and-a-half,” she says with a laugh. “I’ve been here for four years now.”

Often, what starts out as a business relationship turns into a more lasting connection with the U.S. José came to North Carolina in 2001 and currently works as an electrician’s assistant in Durham.

“My plans before were to only stay for three to four years and then go back to Mexico,” he says.

But despite speaking little English and having left behind family in Mexico, José has had a change of heart.

“Right now, my plans have changed. I like it here. I like English. I like my job. I feel okay I want to stay.”

CHAPTER II

Market: The Herald Sun
The News & Observer

Approx. 1,500 words

Ambitious and undocumented: For increasing numbers of immigrants, high school is the end of the road

Julia never wanted to leave Colombia.

She didn't want to pack her life into a suitcase or slip into the U.S. early one summer morning on a tourist visa. But Julia was only 11. And she had no choice. The paramilitary groups that terrorize the country had targeted her family.

"One of my mom's sisters, they burned her alive," she says. "They killed my grandmother. Pretty much my entire family died there."

Seven years later, Julia – whose real name is being withheld because of her immigration status – is a lifetime removed from the violence that drove her family from Bogotá to Carrboro, N.C. Now 18, she speaks perfect English. Together with her mother and older brother, she has managed to build a new life here. And just last June, Julia graduated from East Chapel Hill High with a transcript most seniors can only dream of.

It turns out that her biggest challenge, however, may still lie ahead: finding a way to pay for college.

Julia, like an estimated 270,000 Latinos in North Carolina, is undocumented. She came here legally but overstayed her visa. Under current state policy, anyone – regardless of

legal status – can apply for college. But undocumented immigrants, if admitted, are required to pay out-of-state tuition at state universities.

At UNC-Chapel Hill, this means \$20,988 for one year instead of \$5,340, the in-state rate. Because undocumented students are ineligible for most scholarships and financial aid, this price tag often puts college out of reach.

“Out-of-state tuition makes it, as a practical matter, impossible for these students to go to school,” says Rep. Rick Glazier, a Fayetteville Democrat.

In April 2005, Glazier cosponsored a bill that would have granted in-state tuition rates to undocumented immigrants who completed four years of high school in North Carolina and met other conditions. That bill was quashed amid a torrent of protest. An Elon University poll conducted at the time showed that 41 percent of North Carolinians opposed the measure.

More than two years later, the legislative outlook has not changed. But North Carolina has. The continued evolution of the state’s people and economy has raised the stakes in the immigration debate, leaving opponents and advocates alike clamoring for reform and more students like Julia stuck in the middle.

North Carolina has the fastest-growing Latino population in the nation. From 1990 to 2006, Latinos grew by 782 percent, from 76,726 to 600,913, according to data from a 2006 report by the Kenan Institute for Private Enterprise at UNC-Chapel Hill. As spectacular as this growth has been, the number of Latinos in North Carolina’s public schools has surged even faster, growing by 1,360 percent over the same time span. Since 1990, Latinos have accounted for more than half the total growth in student population.

This means that increasing numbers of students like Julia – ambitious and undocumented – are graduating from North Carolina high schools each year. A 2005

estimate by El Pueblo, a Latino-rights group in Raleigh, counted 425 undocumented graduates with college aspirations – a modest but fast-growing number.

“We should be looking at these youths as a resource,” says Marisol Jimenez-McGee, advocacy director at El Pueblo. “We have all these amazing young people who are stunted in their ability to advance.”

For opponents, however, opening state universities to growing numbers of undocumented graduates is a step in the wrong direction. Americans for Legal Immigration, a Raleigh-based organization that lobbies for stricter enforcement of existing laws, has campaigned to keep undocumented immigrants out of North Carolina’s colleges.

“I believe the main public service that should be promised for illegal aliens is air-conditioned bus and plane rides, with snacks and soft music, back to their families in their home nation,” says the group’s president, William Gheen, in a Sept. 4 article in UNC-Chapel Hill’s student newspaper, The Daily Tar Heel.

But increasing numbers of advocates, legislators and educators worry that frustrating undocumented students’ access to higher education will have significant consequences.

“I think our current immigration policies will seriously come back to hurt us economically and in the security sense,” Rep. Glazier says.

An August 2007 report from the UNC Tomorrow Commission – a study group entrusted with charting the state university’s course through the 21st century – backs Glazier up. North Carolina’s economy will need 400,000 new college graduates by 2014, according to Tomorrow Commission data. But its colleges are expected to produce only 254,000.

Turning away undocumented students in this environment is criminal, committee members say. “It’s an economic imperative that we attract and serve these kids,” former UNC-Charlotte Chancellor Jim Woodward noted in an Aug. 23 Associated Press report.

Limiting college access turns a potential resource into an economic liability, Glazier explains: “We’ve invested tens of thousands on these children in middle school and high school. They’re not being deported, they’re not being sent home, and they’re part of the state’s economic structure.”

Julia spent most of her middle school and high school years in North Carolina’s classrooms. Just a few days after leaving Colombia, she was placed in the sixth grade at Githens Middle School in Durham.

“At first, the language was difficult,” she says. “I didn’t understand a word the teacher was saying.”

But Julia picked up English quickly. By her sophomore year at East Chapel Hill High, she was already taking advanced placement, or AP, classes for college credit. Success, however, didn’t always bring praise from teachers and classmates.

“I used to hear all the time, ‘Wow, you’re Latin American and taking AP classes,’” she says. “Is that an insult or a compliment or what?”

Jimenez-McGee of El Pueblo explains that Latino students can be overwhelmed by negative messages. Undocumented students who get little encouragement in the classroom and see no way of paying for college often lose interest in school.

“There’s definitely an impact in terms of how they think about their future,” she says. “These students see that older students did all they could in school and are still working minimum-wage jobs.”

One consequence of these messages is soaring dropout rates among Latino students. Only 51.8 percent of Latinos who started the ninth grade in 2002 graduated in 2006, compared with 73.6 percent of their white peers, according to a North Carolina Board of Education report. Some students leave school and find a job. But increasing numbers are turning to gangs and crime, Jimenez-McGee says.

“One of the things that make youth vulnerable to gang recruits is that gangs offer protection, a sense of identity, a community,” she says. “We communicate all these exclusionary messages and wonder why generations [of Latinos] are disenfranchised.”

Julia, however, managed to avoid the pitfalls. By the time she graduated from high school last June, she had already completed seven college-level classes – nearly a full year’s worth of university credit. She had earned membership into East Chapel Hill High’s chapter of the National Honor Society. And she finished near the top of her class, carrying a 3.8 grade-point average. When Julia was accepted at UNC-Greensboro last spring, it was no surprise.

It was the tuition that came as a shock. While classmates admitted to UNC-Greensboro were charged around \$2,500 in tuition, Julia – as an undocumented student – was asked to pay nearly \$14,000. The price was too high.

“I asked myself, ‘Do I want to get my family in a debt like that right now?’” Julia says. “I have to think in a cold way and kind of calculate things.”

Undocumented students who manage to succeed in the classroom often discover that high school graduation is the end of their academic career, explains Laura Wenzel, director of Pa’lante, a Carrboro community radio program run by Latino teens. Because these

students cannot work legally or even get a driver's license, they have even fewer opportunities than other high school graduates.

"They end up babysitting and washing dishes and mowing lawns," Wenzel says. "It's definitely not what you think of as a career for someone who is intelligent and creative."

For now, Julia has had to put her college plans on hold. This fall, instead of joining UNC-Greensboro's class of 2011, she joined her mother at work – nannying for a pair of 3-year-olds.

"It's very frustrating," Julia says. "I'm not going to school right now. I can't really work. I can't do pretty much anything."

Still, she's not ready to give up on her college dreams. Julia is busy filling out another round of applications for private universities, including Brown and Columbia. She believes these schools, unlike North Carolina's public universities, will be more willing to extend scholarships and other financial aid to exceptional students, regardless of immigration status.

Still, Julia wishes she could find a way to attend a university closer to the community she's come to call home.

"This is where I've lived for seven years," she says. "This is where I've gone to school. This is where I've built relationships with people . . . I consider myself a resident of North Carolina even though I don't have the papers to prove it."

CHAPTER III

Market: The Independent
(Durham-based alternative weekly)

Approx. 5,000 words

Hometown outlaws: Growing up undocumented in North Carolina

This story was inspired by the article written about college access for undocumented students. It takes a closer look at the life of one of the students interviewed and explores her family's efforts to build a future in North Carolina. It is written in a long-form, magazine style, allowing for a level of analysis difficult to achieve in a standard newspaper article.

Note: Because of their history of political persecution and current immigration status, the family members interviewed for this story requested that their real names be withheld.

Gustavo isn't always politically correct. Ever since he got his green card, the 25-year-old from Colombia likes to make jokes. He'll say something like, "What are we gonna do with all these illegals?" and break into an ironic smile. For most of his seven years in the U.S. – ever since Gustavo entered the country on a six-month tourist visa – he's been living on the wrong side of the law. He knows all about the sacrifices, the hustles, the dead ends. So it's OK, he says, to laugh about it now.

Tonight, however, at the Carrboro apartment he shares with his mother and younger sister, his jokes aren't going over well. The problem is that both are still undocumented. Because Gustavo is legal now, mom could soon have her own green card. But for little sister Julia, who graduated from high school last June, things aren't so simple. At 18, she's on her own. Without documents, Julia can't get a driver's license, board an airplane or even apply for a decent job. And because undocumented students are charged out-of-state rates at North Carolina's universities, her college plans had to be put on hold.

Though they came to the U.S. on the same flight, Julia and Gustavo have adapted to the caprices of immigration policy and undocumented life in starkly different ways.

And while Gustavo can laugh about it now, Julia is looking for someone to blame. “I know other kids, American kids, they’ve been here all their life,” she says. “They could care less about going to college But I can’t go to school. I can’t work. I can’t do pretty much anything.”

Hometown outlaws

North Carolina is home to nearly 270,000 undocumented immigrants, the great majority from Mexico and Latin America. While more arrive each year, increasing numbers of these immigrants have grown up in the state. “They speak English with a Southern accent,” says Marisol Jimenez-McGee, advocacy director at El Pueblo, a Latino-rights group in Raleigh. “They don’t even remember what their country of origin is like.”

Though undocumented students may have attended public schools, played on sports teams and gone to prom, legally they remain a world apart from their American friends and classmates. Reluctant outlaws in their own communities, they lead lives shot through with uncertainty. A routine traffic stop along I-40 could mean deportation. A knock on the door during breakfast could be Immigration officers, handcuffs at the ready.

Choices, too, are painfully limited. Jobs tend to be low-paying, menial and sometimes hazardous: roofing houses, picking tobacco, washing dishes. College is out of the picture: like Julia, few immigrants can afford out-of-state rates. Undocumented immigrants can’t even drive a car legally in North Carolina, since getting a license now requires a Social Security number.

No longer Mexican or Colombian or Guatemalan but barred from becoming American, North Carolina's undocumented community inhabits an uneasy limbo. Once inside, there are no easy exits and few good options. Some choose to wait and hope: for laws to change, attitudes to evolve, a door to open. Others, however, are not so patient.

A key to the good life

Gustavo is smiling again. "Wanna see it?" he asks. With a flourish, he reaches into his wallet. Out comes the green card. It's actually white. And there he is, right on the front. Next to the photo is a thumb print. On the back, there's an official looking magnetic strip with his personal data and immigration history.

And it's the real deal, not one of the \$100 fakes available lots of places these days. When he starts talking about the card, Gustavo's eyes grow wide, like a child describing dinosaurs or magic.

"It's a big door that opens," he says. "Everything looks different. You get a taste of what everybody else has."

With his permanent resident card, Gustavo is pretty much home free. Provided he doesn't commit any major crimes, cheat on his taxes or try to overthrow the government, he can live here as long as he pleases. He can apply for any job he wants and enter and leave the country at his leisure. Though he's not a real citizen yet, with enough money and the right lawyer, Gustavo could be an American in just a few years.

But getting the card wasn't easy. Generally, Gustavo isn't the type to dwell on the past. "It's not like I can go back in time and fix things so they look prettier," he says. But when it comes to how he got his hands on the card, he pauses and gets serious.

"If there was something I regretted," he says, "getting married would be the part."

“But I wasn’t given much to deal with,” he says, shrugging his shoulders and quickly recovering his smile. “Those were just my options. It’s like you’re waiting for a bus, and that’s the bus you have to get on. If you miss it, you don’t know when the next one is gonna come.”

The walls close in

Julia looks nothing like her older brother. Where Gustavo is dark, with close-shaven black hair and deep brown eyes, Julia is fair. She has long hair that she often wears pinned back. Together with her rimless eyeglasses, the hairstyle gives her the look of a librarian or a scholar, which is not too far off the mark. Julia, according to everyone in the family, is a genius.

“She’s always been the intellectual one,” Gustavo says. “I like to go out, to party. She likes to stay in with the books and read.” In many respects, Julia has a preternatural poise. She carries herself with impeccable posture, chooses her words carefully and is just as comfortable talking about cell biology as social justice. “She’s always been real mature for her age,” Gustavo explains.

Still, her braces give her away. Julia is only 18, just out of high school. Her dreams change with her moods. She wants to travel, to be a lawyer, to own her own business, to act. And like lots of teenagers, Julia can be moody, anxious and defensive. She says things like, “I’m more of a victim now than I thought I would be.” To hear her tell it, the whole world is against her: close-minded teachers, cruel classmates, uncaring guidance counselors.

But maybe she’s got a point. Since she graduated last June, the bright girl with braces who made the National Honor Society at her high school has been plunged deeper than ever into the shadows of undocumented life. All of a sudden, the long days of cramming for tests,

of applying for colleges and of racing from one after school activity to the next came to an end.

And once late August rolled around, and the spot she had worked so hard to get in UNC-Greensboro's class of 2011 was gone for good, the picture got a little bleaker.

"During the week, sometimes I stop and think that everyone from school is in college right now," she says. "And it's kind of weird."

From Bogotá to RDU

Julia and Gustavo's first glimpse of North Carolina came on an August morning seven years ago. They had boarded a plane together in Bogotá a day earlier, their lives winnowed down into a pair of suitcases. Julia, only 11 at the time, brought a book of fairytales. Gustavo, then 18, found room for a tennis racket.

Gustavo remembers a few things from that first drive back from the Raleigh-Durham airport. There were the new smells of summer flowers, the deep green forests that border I-40, the maze of lonely highways leading into Carrboro.

But most of all, he remembers wondering who that woman in the front seat was. It had been two years since Gustavo and Julia last saw their mother – two years since Ana fled Colombia seeking refuge in a country she'd never visited before.

"I remember feeling like I really didn't know that person waiting for me anymore," Gustavo says. There were few tears on that first ride, no desperate embraces. In fact, Gustavo remembers they hardly spoke at all.

Ana, the matriarch of the family, has a kind face and smiles easily. She likes to wear brightly-colored dresses and makes excellent *arepas*, Colombian hotcakes made from corn

flour and filled with cheese. She can be playful and spontaneous and wears her 50 years lightly.

The problem is that Ana, and Julia and Gustavo, too, bear a stain so indelible they had to come halfway around the world to escape it: their own blood. “My family belongs to the history of Colombia,” Ana begins. Depending on whom you talk to, her father was either a Colombian revolutionary fighter or a bandit. What’s clear, however, is that by the time of his death in the late 1960s, Ana’s father had pushed a lot of buttons, inside Colombia and out.

During the 1950s, a time in Colombia’s history known simply as “la violencia,” Ana’s father defected from the Colombian army with a small band of soldiers. In the lawless countryside, he built a 20,000-strong militia and carved out a private enclave nearly half the size of Rhode Island. Along the way, he earned a reputation as a “*matón*,” a killer’s killer who brutally dispensed with enemies. Eventually, the government caught up with him. Ana’s father was killed, along with most of his family, in a violent showdown at his jungle plantation.

Though Ana and a few siblings survived and were raised by relatives, their father’s blood proved a dangerous liability. Ana’s first husband was gunned down just before coming off a graveyard shift when Gustavo was just a baby. Authorities called it random violence; Ana suspects otherwise. Around the time Julia was born, a brother of Ana’s was assassinated after being elected to a local office. Then, in 1997, another brother was shot down in a small town outside Bogotá. When Ana traveled there for the funeral, she says she got a warning from the taxi driver. “Why are you here?” he asked. “They’re going to kill you.”

The choice wasn't an easy one, but she was running out of options. In October 1997, Ana bought a plane ticket to Los Angeles. She had no time to worry about visas or political asylum or bureaucrats at the embassy. She entered the U.S. as a tourist, planning to find work and a place to live. She would send for Gustavo and Julia as soon as the time was right. But the weeks turned to months, then years.

"At times," Gustavo says, "we wondered if we were ever going to see her again."

But, speeding west from the airport toward a new life in Carrboro, the family was finally back together. And, maybe for the first time, they were safe.

"Find yourself a wife"

This afternoon, Gustavo – as usual – is busy. He's just got off his shift, working part-time in a lab at a local research university. He's only a tech, but it's a step up from the jobs he used to get: Think deep fryers not test tubes. Lately, he's been trying to read up on the lab's research. He picks up one article, run through with yellow highlighter: It's titled "Brainstem origins for cortical 'what' and 'where' pathways in the auditory system."

Gustavo's got his sights on med school. But that's down the road. Right now, he's concentrating on getting into UNC-Chapel Hill next fall as an undergraduate. A half-filled out FAFSA form, for federal financial aid, waits in his backpack.

A few years ago, his prospects looked considerably less rosy. "For the longest time, I was so bitter," Gustavo says. "A lot of doors shut in your face if you go knocking on them according to the protocol." To help explain just how he opened those doors, Gustavo takes out a piece of paper. On the back, he begins sketching a timeline.

2000 – arrived.

2001 – met Erica.

2003 – got married.

2004 – filed for green card.

They met at work. Gustavo was waiting tables at a chain restaurant in Durham, an Italian place right off the highway. Only a year into his life in North Carolina, he had already worked at a half-dozen different restaurants. Employers rarely demanded documents or would accept bogus Social Security numbers no questions asked. Starting from the bottom, making biscuits for minimum wage at a fast-food restaurant, he worked his way up. Waiting tables, Gustavo could bring home \$200 on a good night.

But he was burned out on restaurant work. “People treat you like shit,” Gustavo says. “And everything I earned went to pay expenses.” He had other things to worry about, too. Plans to seek political asylum in the U.S. had fallen through. A lawyer at a Latino-rights group in Durham explained that since there was no immediate danger to him back home, he wasn’t eligible for special status. In other words, Gustavo was just another illegal.

He was ready to give up and go home. “I realized it wasn’t going to get any better here,” he says. Gustavo broke the news to his girlfriend over the phone. Erica was a freshman in college who waitressed at the restaurant a few times a week to earn extra money. The two had been dating for about six months, ever since Gustavo got a ride home after work one night.

Not that it was a great match, he says. Her parents, white-collar professional types, never approved of him. And, he thought she was immature: too young to be trusted, too wild for anything serious.

He phoned that night planning to cut things off. “I told her I wanted to go to school,” Gustavo says, “but I couldn’t because I didn’t have the papers.” At least in Colombia he

could get into college and find a real job. The more they talked, though, the more Gustavo thought about something that came up during his visit to the Latino-rights group.

After dashing his hopes for political asylum, the lawyer had suggested another option. “Why not get married?” he asked. “Find yourself a wife?”

Gustavo doesn’t remember just how the phone call with his girlfriend ended that night. It’s not like they decided to tie the knot then and there. By the time he hung up, though, he knew he wouldn’t be going back to Colombia.

A year later more or less – Gustavo doesn’t recall the exact date – he was in a downtown Durham courthouse with Erica at his side. There were no friends there for the ceremony. No family. The wedding was a secret. As Gustavo and Erica got ready to exchange the rings, the judge made things official.

“It was like, ‘Do you accept so and so for the rest of your life?’” Gustavo says. “The whole speech.”

A few months later, he started the paperwork for his green card.

Julia’s high school years: *Latina and smart*

The application for admission at the University of North Carolina is 15 pages long. It’s got essay questions, honor codes to sign and places to list every accolade earned since the ninth grade. But arguably the most important part, especially for undocumented students, is the first page. Below the spaces for name and address looms a section titled “Citizenship.” U.S. citizens check one box. Permanent residents, i.e. green card holders, check another.

For undocumented students, there’s a third box: “Non-Resident Alien.” UNC accepts applications from anyone, regardless of their legal status. But undocumented students – no matter how many years they’ve lived in North Carolina – are treated just like

out-of-staters. This means, first of all, it's harder to get in: Only 18 percent of spots go to people from outside the state. And, second, tuition is considerably steeper. At Chapel Hill, the total comes to \$20,988 for one year compared to the in-state rate of \$5,340.

By her senior year of high school, Julia was no closer to being a U.S. citizen than when she got off the plane in Raleigh six years before. In her own mind, however, she was more American than Colombian. She hadn't been back to Colombia since leaving all those years ago. She had no friends left in Bogotá. She had no idea what music was popular, or what kids her age talked about or what they watched on TV.

And there were all the milestones, the noteworthy and routine, that Julia had lived through right here in North Carolina: trips to Carolina coast on her birthdays; a broken wrist in the ninth grade; the Thanksgiving the family spent in D.C.; acting classes; middle school graduation, all grown up in a black dress and make-up; high school P.E.; the SATs.

And, of course, all the late nights spent cramming in her bedroom: for biology and chemistry and statistics and English and psychology. In fact, as Julia recounts her time in the U.S., it's clear that many of her memories are from the classroom. Maybe that shouldn't be a surprise. By the time she graduated last June, she had earned credit for seven college-level classes, or almost a whole year of university coursework.

But Julia is careful not to let her high school memories get too rosy. Like a lot of American teens, she's got a well-developed sense of righteousness – you might call it an attitude. Get her going, and she'll rattle off a whole list of people who treated her badly and all the times she got the short end of the stick.

But this isn't just the usual teenage rivalry, teacher-hates-me kind of stuff.

Because she was Colombian, Julia got teased, a lot. Kids would ask her if she had cocaine or marijuana to sell them or if she knew Pablo Escobar, the Medellin drug kingpin. Even praise veiled prejudice.

“I used to hear all the time, ‘Wow! You’re Latin American and taking AP classes,’” Julia says. “Is that a compliment, an insult or what?”

What was even worse, though, was when they didn’t know. Because Julia is fair-skinned and speaks without an accent, classmates sometimes didn’t realize she was Latino. During her junior year, undocumented immigration in North Carolina was making headlines. An initiative in the state legislature to extend in-state tuition rates to all high school graduates, regardless of legal status, brought emotions into the open.

In AP government class, things got ugly. Some students – and teachers, too – argued in favor of shipping undocumented immigrants back home. Julia just sat and listened. “I felt so alone,” she says. “I didn’t want to talk because I thought if I said something I’d burst into tears.”

By senior year though, Julia was ready to put it all behind her. Talk had turned to colleges, and she had a transcript many of her classmates could only dream of. So she wrote the application essays, signed the honor codes and got the references from her teachers.

And, right underneath her name and her address, she checked the box for non-resident alien. In the space provided, she wrote that she was Colombian.

“I didn’t see a reason for me to lie,” Julia says. “If anyone asks me where I’m from, I’m gonna say I’m from Colombia.”

A mother's dilemma

Ana thinks about Colombia often. More than her children, she's a product of the country. It comes out in her accent, thick and lyrical, filled with pauses and improvisations. "I like to care for children," she explains, "but medicine is what I'm *apasionada* for." It's there in her style, too. Ana is a child of the tropics, and it still shows in the ease of her smile and the colors of her clothes.

Colombia also lives in her memories. Last week was the anniversary of her first husband's murder. Ana keeps a tiny picture of him, smiling in police uniform, in a silver frame. He looks just like Gustavo, only a little younger. Ana has another daughter back home, too, older than the others and with a family of her own now. She worries about her and wonders if her grandchildren are safe.

"When you're young, you don't care about the dangers," Ana says. "But, when you have children, you're not only thinking about you."

Ana's apartment in Carrboro is cluttered with boxes and suitcases and stacks of papers. A few months ago, the family moved from across town because electricity rates rose too high. There are few furnishings in the new place: a couch, a coffee table, nothing on the walls. Ana explains that they'll buy real furniture once they settle down.

But it's been seven years now.

Once upon a time, Ana had plans for herself and her family. She was going to get a job, save money and get her nursing license so she could work in a hospital like back in Colombia. But all that seems quaint now. Almost from the moment Ana set foot in this country, her life has lurched along on its own course, leaving her struggling to hang on. For

a long time, she's just tried to keep up: pay the bills, keep the family fed and find time to go to church.

Ana nannies now five days a week, cleaning house and watching young children for an under-the-table salary. This routine has become the rhythm of her life, carrying her from week to week, month to month and year to year. Of course, she worries about Julia finding a way to go to school. "Sometimes, I'm very sad about my daughter's situation," she says. And she worries about Gustavo's marriage. "He doesn't talk a lot about the things he had to go through," she says.

But Ana is in her fifties now. She's taking English classes but will probably never lose her accent, or her smile. She fought to get out of Colombia, and she fought to get Julia and Gustavo here. But here, in a country where she's still a stranger, Ana is no longer in the driver's seat.

"I'm very confused sometimes," she says. "I ask, 'Did I do the best or no?'"

Getting on with his life

Gustavo still has the timeline he started set out in front of him. He's got one more thing to add: the next milestone. He hesitates, though, before putting it on paper and making it real. "The whole fact of us being young was hard," he explains. But it's the right thing to do, he says. Then he cuts a new slash through the line.

2007 – divorce.

Whether the marriage was for real in the first place – or just a matter of convenience or even a favor between friends – is hard to tell. "Before we got married, we talked about it as an agreement," Gustavo says. "So I could stay in the U.S." But like so many aspects of undocumented life, the marriage itself is murky and rife with contradictions.

Erica and Gustavo loved each other, at least for a little while. She moved out of the dorms at college and into his family's apartment in Carrboro. And her parents warmed to Gustavo in the end, helping with the \$2,200 in application and lawyer's fees for his green card. Still, Gustavo has trouble remembering his anniversary. And he has little to say on the subject of whether his wife ever felt taken advantage of.

One thing that is clear, however, is that Gustavo's life changed for the better once he got his green card in 2005. The days of waiting tables ended. With the right documents, he was finally able to enroll in an associate's degree program at a community college where undocumented immigrants had been barred from all but a few English language and vocational classes. A reference from a friend helped him land an internship at a university lab. And he found a good-paying job at a local clinic, counseling couples on birth control.

None of it, he says, would have been possible without the green card. "Something where I was challenging my intellect?" he asks. "No way. Those jobs are hard to get if you're not with the system."

The marriage, however, was another story. They fought often. Despite their affection, doubts about whether the marriage was borne of love or convenience lingered. Cultural differences compounded problems. Gustavo's closest friends were his mother and sister, and Erica couldn't understand how important family was to him. "She felt like they were a threat to her," he explains. "We hug, we kiss. That's how we show our love." Gustavo and Erica also had different ideas on what was expected of a new wife and daughter-in-law. Erica, still in college, liked to drink and party with friends. Gustavo had outgrown his wild years. And maybe mom, Julia and Erica all under the same roof was a recipe for

disaster. After three years together, Gustavo and Erica had had enough. Like lots of young married couples, they decided to separate.

Spinning her wheels

Julia can't really explain why she went to all the trouble of filling out the application for UNC-Greensboro and mailing it in and paying the \$45 application fee. Sometimes, she claims she just didn't know. "I never saw tuition as a problem for me," she says. "I said as long as I work hard, that's not gonna be a problem."

Maybe. But Julia's too bright. She would have done her homework. She would have pulled up the UNC Greensboro Web site and found the magic numbers: \$15,309 per year for out-of-state students like her, around \$60,000 for a 4-year degree. Julia would have known exactly how far out of reach the cost of a college education was.

The real explanation has more to do with wishful thinking and plain desperation. College wasn't Julia's best choice, it was her only choice. In high school, she was the host of a teen radio program. She was the girl who had all the answers in statistics. She was a Spanish tutor and a peer mentor and an Honor Society secretary.

But outside, she was invisible, another undocumented immigrant. And without college, that's the life she'd have to look forward to. "I was afraid if I didn't give the effort, I'd stay like this," Julia says. "That was one of my biggest fears."

So she applied and hoped for a scholarship, financial aid, anything.

When the acceptance from Greensboro came, Julia didn't celebrate. Just a few paragraphs below "congratulations," the letter made clear that as an undocumented student Julia had no access to federal or state aid. She had a decision to make. Where was she going to get the money?

“I have to think in a cold way and kind of calculate things,” she explains. “I asked myself, ‘Do I want to get my family in a debt like that right now?’”

‘Why don’t you get married?’

“It comes up,” Gustavo explains, “but as a joke.” He’s talking about his sister: about her options now that she’s not going to college. “It’s something that’s crossed everybody’s mind: ‘Hey, why don’t you get married?’”

Back in the kitchen of their Carrboro apartment, Gustavo is standing at the sink doing the dinner dishes. Julia sits with her mom at the table. Ana puts her head in her hands and holds it there. Seconds pass. It’s been a long day at work with the kids. Julia looks tired, too. Ever since high school ended last year, she’s been helping her mom out with the nannying. Not for money, Julia explains: “It’s just to go with her. I’d rather be distracted.”

Marriage isn’t even on Julia’s radar right now. She’s never had a boyfriend. And Gustavo’s experiences haven’t been the best endorsement for marital bliss. So she tags along with mom, helps clean up after the kids and plays teacher. “At this point, we’re teaching them numbers,” she says.

Free moments during the day – in fact, every chance she gets – are spent on the Internet, researching colleges and filling out applications. “That’s what really sucks right now,” Julia says, “I wrote the essays last year, and I have to write them again this year.” She’s hard at work on one now: If you were a fly on a wall, whose wall would it be?

But Julia’s situation has not changed, at all, since last year. She’s still undocumented. And tuition costs have only inched higher with the passage of time. “I just don’t want to stop,” she explains. “What else am I going to do?” On the table next to her is a book the size of a bible with big block letters across the front: SCHOLARSHIPS. Her college counselors

all said there was no money for undocumented students. She's determined to prove them wrong.

Gustavo finishes the dishes and sits down. He's got a new toy. It's the latest cell phone, the one with the \$400 price tag that plays music, surfs the net and does about everything except have a conversation for you. Talk at the table turns to phone plans, then weekend plans, then veers to politics back home. Gustavo thinks Hugo Chavez is good for South America. Mom doesn't and lets her son know it.

Ana is halfway through a tirade in Spanish when there's a knock on the door. The room falls silent. Eyes turn toward the sound. It's late for visitors at the Carrboro apartment, and unexpected guests aren't a good sign. The family grows as stock still as the unpacked boxes and suitcases in their living room.

Another knock. Finally, Gustavo rises and quickly, quietly tiptoes to the front door. Craning his neck, he brings his head closer to the peephole. He holds his breath and squints.

Then he smiles and brings his hand down to the lock. The door opens, and a neighbor from downstairs pokes her head in. Just wanted to say hi, she says, waving to Ana and Julia. Then conversations resume. The room comes back to life. Ana rises and wipes down the kitchen counters. Gustavo wanders into his bedroom. And Julia takes her station beside the computer, eager to start the next application.

CHAPTER IV

Market: The Herald Sun
The News & Observer

Approx. 2,100 words

Latino births in North Carolina surge and hospitals respond

On the fifth floor of the N.C. Women's Hospital, high above the streets of Chapel Hill, is a window on the state's future.

Behind a thick pane of glass – inside the nursery of the maternity ward – sleep tomorrow's Tar Heels: wrapped in blankets and tucked safely in plastic bassinets.

And, on most days, about half of these babies are Latino.

North Carolina has undergone brisk demographic change in recent years. In 1990-2006, the Latino population increased 678 percent, from 76,726 to 597,382, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The number of Latino children in the state's public schools increased even faster, growing by more than 1,000 percent during those same years.

But maternity wards across the state have seen some of the most dramatic changes. Latino births have increased 11 times over since 1990. In 2006, more than 21,000 births – or one of every six new North Carolinians – was Latino.

Women's Hospital in Chapel Hill has been one of the epicenters of the boom in Latino births. With a well-developed system of obstetrical clinics in the region, the hospital absorbs births from most neighboring counties with sizeable Latino populations. In 2005, the last year official statistics were available, 37.4 percent of babies born at the hospital were Latino. But even those numbers have quickly fallen out of date.

“It’s actually more around 50 percent these days,” Viall says. “And that’s been rising.”

As striking as the numbers are, behind the statistics lies another story. At the same time that many state agencies are working to weed out undocumented immigrants, Women’s Hospital has found innovative ways to reach – and embrace – a growing segment of North Carolina’s population.

To Viall, it’s just common sense: “We’re all about diversity because that’s what our patient population is.”

Explaining the baby surge

Across town, Mahli – 32 and originally from Mexico – is busy. Though only two months have passed since she delivered her baby at Women’s Hospital, she’s already back to work at a Chapel Hill day care center. She raises her voice to be heard above the sound of crying toddlers and lullaby music.

“Thankfully, everyone at the hospital treated me well,” she says in Spanish. “For the most part, I’m happy with the care I got.”

Mahli – who is undocumented and asked that her last name not be used – came to North Carolina two years ago, after spending time in Michigan and Texas. Her 2-month-old is her second child born in the U.S. She plans for one more: maybe a little boy to keep her two daughters company.

The recent growth in the Latino population only partly explains the increase in Latino births. The other piece of the puzzle is fertility rate, the number of live births per every 1,000 women of child-bearing age. Statewide, Latina mothers like Mahli have a fertility rate more

than double that of the general population, according to 2006 figures from the State Center for Health Statistics.

A relatively young Latino population, plus taboos about birth control and limited use of family-planning services, contribute to the difference, according to a report from the N.C. Office of Minority Health. Other cultural factors are important as well.

“The Latina community has a very strong orientation towards babies, towards children,” explains Merry-K. Moos, a professor at UNC’s School of Medicine and nurse practitioner. “It’s very much a culture that reveres pregnant women.”

High birth rates among Latinos have contributed to an unprecedented surge in deliveries at Women’s Hospital. In 2006, 1,000 more babies were delivered than just five years before.

All of these extra births have stretched hospital resources, Moos explains. But, she says, Latinos are only part of the equation:

“Do we have increasing strain? Yes. Do we have increasing strain for a lot of reasons? Yes.”

The general population of the state has grown dramatically, with Latinos accounting for less than one-quarter of total growth since 1990. At the same time, Women’s Hospital has been busy promoting its state of the art maternity center to expectant moms.

“We’re trying to attract more patients to our practice,” she says. “We’ve made efforts to attract high-risk patients.”

These factors have led to some growing pains at Women’s Hospital. The nursery in the maternity ward, opened in 2001, is already at capacity and slated to expand from 15 cribs to 24.

“Sometimes it’s not easy to find a bed that’s available,” says Viall, the nursing director. “But every hospital I know is dealing with capacity issues right now.”

Meeting the demand

Despite the speed of changes, the hospital has moved quickly to accommodate new demands. One priority has been ensuring that Latina women get prenatal care. Most Latina mothers are now served through a system of 17 outlying clinics in Orange and neighboring counties targeted at underserved populations, rather than at the hospital itself.

Adriana, a Chatham County mom originally from Mexico, was treated at the Carrboro Community Health Center during her pregnancy. Prenatal patients there pay a flat fee of \$30 per visit and are charged on a sliding scale for blood tests and other extras.

“I never had to pay more than the minimum,” Adriana says.

Because she’s undocumented, Adriana – like many Latina moms – wasn’t eligible for Medicaid. “Most [Latino patients] pay in cash and are remarkably conscientious,” says Laurie Fox, a physician’s assistant at the center.

Doctors diagnosed Adriana with gestational diabetes, a form of the disease that develops during pregnancy and is common in minority populations. Diet and treatments kept it in check, and last march Adriana gave birth to a healthy boy.

Allaying patient fears is another key to serving the Latino population, explains Dr. Sandra Clark, who works at the Carrboro center: “The main thing is giving them a place where they can go and feel safe.” The center does not inquire into immigration status, and all patients receive the same level of service.

Still, stepped-up efforts by law enforcement to identify and deport undocumented immigrants – including the federal 287(g) program, which lets local police investigate the

immigration status of people stopped for traffic violations and other offenses – have frustrated access to care.

“Patients are scared to drive because they’re scared they’re going to get stopped and deported,” Dr. Clark says. “There’s been a huge decrease in the number of patients just in the past week But once they get to the clinic, it’s no problem.”

Aside from addressing legal concerns, the Carrboro center has worked hard to bridge the language gap. About 30 to 40 percent of the receptionists, nurses and doctors are now bilingual, Dr. Clark says, part of a long-term plan to respond to local population changes. “Twelve years ago we were smart enough to anticipate that a lot of the working poor would be Latino,” she explains.

Today 41 percent of all women – and most Latina moms – get their prenatal care through the outlying clinics. This enables Women’s Hospital to focus on providing specialized treatment for high-risk pregnancies and on handling the crucial final act: the delivery.

Dr. Clark says patients are often reluctant to leave the clinic when it’s time to be handed off to experts at the hospital: “They’ll ask me, ‘*Doctora, doctora*, are you gonna be at my delivery?’”

The delivery

Back in Women’s Hospital, head nurse Viall is pointing to one of the new Latino babies in the nursery. The tiny child’s bassinet has been wheeled under a special blue spotlight to help with a mild case of jaundice. Wearing a paper mask to protect his eyes, and glowing a shade of deep blue, he looks more like a Smurf than a newborn.

“The biggest adaptation for us has been understanding that Latinas don’t want to stay here a long time,” Viall explains. “They want to get back with the community and family resources they have.”

Despite being a long way from home, Mahli, the new mom, had plenty of support during her pregnancy. A cousin from Raleigh lent a hand around the house. The pastor from her church helped out. And during the last part of her pregnancy, an aunt from Texas stayed with her for three weeks.

But not everything went smoothly. A week after her due date, Mahli was still waiting to have her baby. Concerned about the child’s health, she came to Women’s Hospital for a sonogram.

At the hospital, doctors and staff have worked to anticipate the needs of Latina mothers. UNC Hospitals has a dedicated department to handle translations, with more than a dozen professionals on-site. Two are on call at the maternity ward.

Many doctors and nurses, as well, have appended Spanish classes to traditional medical studies. “I took social Spanish so that I could put patients at ease,” explains Professor Moos, who – in addition to teaching responsibilities – sees plenty of Latina moms as a nurse practitioner at the hospital. “I can ask, ‘Is the baby moving?’ and very rudimentary things like that.”

When Mahli came to the hospital, she brought her husband – who speaks English and Spanish – to help translate. But news wasn’t good. The baby’s heart was beating too slowly, doctors said. They would have to induce labor.

This is the part of the story that Mahli doesn't like telling. Once she was in labor, another problem developed: The baby was in breech position, coming out backward. Later that night, doctors decided to do a Caesarean section.

Mahli doesn't remember much after that. She lost a lot of blood. There were transfusions. Papers to sign. At one point, her husband prayed.

And in the end, she had a healthy 7-pound, 2-ounce baby girl.

Paying the bill

After the birth, Mahli spent three days in the hospital recovering from surgery. But when she was well enough to go home, a new problem loomed: the bill.

The average cost of a Caesarean birth with complications in North Carolina is nearly \$16,651, according to an estimate from Blue Cross and Blue Shield. While Medicaid and private insurance normally cover these costs, most undocumented Latino immigrants are uninsured.

Though Mahli had paid down her prenatal bills, mailing in \$20 every month, the cost of the delivery was out of reach. "It would have been like if I was buying a new car," she says.

But Mahli, like all uninsured moms who give birth in the U.S., was eligible for a program known as emergency Medicaid. Coverage applies only to emergency conditions and is used in North Carolina primarily for labor and delivery costs. And unlike normal Medicaid, emergency Medicaid is available to anyone – regardless of immigration status – whose income falls below state limits.

For deliveries, all families earning up to 185 percent of the federal poverty limit, which comes to around \$38,000 for a family of four, are fully covered. Medicaid picked up Mahli's tab. She doesn't even remember seeing the bill.

Her case is hardly unusual. According to a study in the March 14, 2007, Journal of the American Medical Association, 99 percent of North Carolina's emergency Medicaid patients treated in 2001-04 were in the country illegally. Caring for these patients translated into an extra \$12 million in emergency Medicaid spending.

Despite soaring costs, the study's authors pointed out that emergency Medicaid accounted for less than 1 percent of total Medicaid spending in the state during that period.

Two months after leaving the hospital, Mahli is now applying for long-term insurance coverage for her new daughter. Because the baby is a U.S. citizen and a legal resident of North Carolina, she's eligible for Medicaid. "The hard part is just getting all the paperwork together," she says.

Looking back on the treatment she received, Mahli is grateful, though some bad memories linger. "With all the problems during delivery, it was a very unpleasant experience," she says. "But I'm happy with the care I got."

Back in the maternity ward of Women's Hospital, another day is in full swing. Along the central hallway, known for good reason as the "racetrack," new moms in wheelchairs jockey for position with nurses and doctors in pink and blue scrubs. Slicing through it all, nurse Viall offers her take on the care offered to Latina moms.

"I think we serve them great," she says. "Our patient satisfaction surveys come back with very positive comments."

Continuing past the nursery, where the new babies have begun to stir, Viall rounds a corner and stops next to a bulletin board. Crowding the board are thank-you notes from new mothers addressed to the hospital staff. Some are in English. Many are in Spanish.

Together, they are another peek through the looking glass. Read between the lines, and a new picture of North Carolina begins to take shape.

“Thanks a lot for your *atención*,” one note reads. “God bless to everyone.”

CHAPTER V

Market: The Herald Sun
The News & Observer

Approx. 1,250 words

Spanish for the pre-kindergarten set: Parents line up for immersion day cares

It's playtime at Tiny Steps day care in Chapel Hill, and 1-year-old Maya Brooke is learning her animals. Lying on her back, she stares at a toy overhead where Tweety, Bugs and Daffy twirl round and round. Her teacher points, pronouncing the animal names slowly.

"*Pajarito. Conejo. Pato,*" she says, listing the animals in Spanish while Maya looks on.

Tiny Steps, or *Pasitos* in Spanish, is one of a growing number of Spanish-immersion day cares in the Triangle. With names like Spanish for Fun and Mi Escuelita, these centers work just like normal day cares except Spanish is the only language you'll hear inside.

And while English-only laws are sprouting up in towns throughout North Carolina, Triangle parents – white, African-American and Latino – are literally lining up to enroll their kids in these Spanish-language programs.

"We're basically full all the time, with a big waiting list," says Adriana Martinez, owner of the Spanish for Fun Academy in Chapel Hill. Martinez's school has 79 children, with another 80 waiting for a spot to open.

"It's a year-long wait to get in," she says. "We're looking to expand but can't find the space."

Dramatic growth in North Carolina's Latino community has fueled a sudden interest in Spanish for the pre-kindergarten crowd. In 1990-2006, the Latino population grew 678 percent, from 76,726 to 597,382, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Nearly 10 percent of the state's total population now speaks a foreign language at home.

With Spanish increasingly important in the workplace, classroom and community, many parents are eager to give their children a head start on the new language.

"There's a growing awareness in our community that being bilingual is an asset," says Linda Chappel, a vice-president at Child Care Services Association, a Triangle nonprofit that helps parents find and pay for day care.

Last year, 42 percent of all families who got referrals from Chappel's Orange County office said a bilingual staff was an important criterion in their choice of a day care. "A lot of families want their child to have that advantage, the advantage of being bilingual," Chappel says.

In Orange, Durham and Wake Counties, more than 100 providers now offer Spanish day care programs, according to data from the Child Care Services Association. Many of these are bilingual schools, with some instruction in Spanish and some in English. But growing numbers are true immersion programs, where everything from story time to arts and crafts is entirely in Spanish.

And enrollment – for the most part – is made up of children who don't speak Spanish at home.

At the Spanish for Fun Academy, located in walking distance of UNC Hospitals in Chapel Hill, 85 percent of the children are from a non-Latino background, says owner Martinez. "A lot of our parents work in the hospitals," she says. "They have a lot of contact

with people who don't speak English [and] think it's useful for their children to learn Spanish."

Carol Brooke, mother of 1-year-old Maya, knows firsthand how valuable Spanish can be in the Triangle. Brooke is an attorney at the North Carolina Justice Center in Raleigh, a nonprofit legal service that provides support for immigrants and other groups in need.

"I work with migrant farm workers, and all of my clients speak Spanish," Brooke says. "I know how important it's going to be for [Maya] to speak Spanish in her lifetime."

Maya started at Tiny Steps when she was only 4 months old. Five days a week, from early morning drop-off to pickup around 5 p.m., she gets a steady stream of Spanish from her teachers, all of whom are native speakers.

So far, though, Maya hasn't had much chance to show off her new skills.

"She just says a few words," her mom explains, "all in English."

Today Maya is bundled up in a heavy jumper and boots, crawling around the center's fenced-in outdoor play area. When she starts fidgeting with the zipper, her teacher – a 32-year-old immigrant from Mexico named Mahli – gives her a stern warning in Spanish.

"*¡No te quites el sueter!*" she says. "Don't you take off that sweater!" Maya's hands fall to her sides.

"She understands Spanish very well," Mahli says. "I'll tell her to do something, and she knows what to do."

Young children have an extraordinary capacity to absorb and understand languages, explains Dr. Kateri Carver-Akers, head of The Language Center, a Chapel Hill immersion school for 3-, 4- and 5-year-olds.

“Children under the age of 10 learn languages very easily,” she says. “Zero to 6 is the strongest [time]. Basically they learn it with no effort at all.”

Carver-Akers’ school currently has 24 students in its Spanish-immersion program. The benefits of studying Spanish at an early age go well beyond language skills, she says: “Statistically, children have more flexible cognitive abilities when they are bilingual. You get better SAT scores. You get a better job.”

These benefits don’t necessarily come cheap, however. A full-day program at The Language Center costs around \$1,100 a month, about the same price as other immersion courses in the area. Still, Carver-Akers’ says the cost is no higher than at a lot of English-language day cares.

And, she says, immersion brings another potential benefit: “A bilingual person almost always develops into a philosophically flexible person,” she says. “And that’s basically what tolerance is.”

At the Spanish for Fun Academy, owner Martinez says she has seen impressive results as well, especially with early starters. Students who began learning Spanish while still in the cradle are now confident speakers. “All the toddlers speak Spanish very well,” she says. “They’re fluent”

Still, researchers warn to keep the gains in perspective. “It can be misleading to say the younger the child is, the easier the learning,” explains Dr. Dina Castro, a scientist at UNC’s FPG Child Development Institute who specializes in young second-language learners.

Toddlers may learn to use a second language for basic needs, Castro explains, like asking for food or toys. But that doesn't mean they'll be able to express themselves in more sophisticated ways when they're older.

And once children leave the immersion environment, second language skills may fade quickly. "It's wonderful that they start early. . . . But that's the beginning of the process," Castro says. "If you don't support the child in continuing to learn the second language, they're going to lose it."

Though her daughter is still in diapers, Maya's mom, Brooke, is already planning for the future. When the time comes, she's thinking of enrolling Maya in a dual-language program offered at Carrboro Elementary. Kindergarten through fifth-grade students in the program are taught for half the day in English and half in Spanish.

"If you don't use it, you lose it," explains Dr. Carver-Akers, who is opening a private language-immersion elementary school in Durham next fall. "It's not like riding a bike." She says interest in the school shows parents are beginning to see the importance of a second language.

"Most people in the world are bilingual," she says. "And we're just the opposite as Americans."

For now, however, Maya is still working on her first word. On Friday afternoon at Tiny Steps, she's waits in the baby room, the last to leave.

Mom and dad come in, and the room is suddenly filled with a strange language: English. It's time to go home. On the way out, propped on mom's hip, Maya tries to wave goodbye to her teacher.

"*Adiós, Maya,*" Mahlie says. "*Te veo el lunes.*" "I'll see you on Monday."

APPENDIX: A SURVEY OF COVERAGE OF LATINO MIGRATION IN LOCAL NEWSPAPERS

Purpose

While researchers have examined coverage of Latinos in North Carolina (Vargas, 2000; Smith & Furuseth, 2006), these studies have focused on individual newspapers during different periods of time. Because this thesis aims to fill in some of the gaps in existing coverage of Latinos, it is important to know what those gaps are. To get a sense of the ways that Latinos have been represented in North Carolina – which elements are overemphasized and which overlooked – a survey of newspaper articles over a five year span in The Charlotte Observer and The News & Observer was conducted.

Limitations

This survey is not intended as a traditional content or framing analysis but rather as a tool to assess general trends in existing coverage and inform the writing of the articles in this project. While its purpose is to examine representations of Latino migration in the local media, only articles containing the keywords “Hispanic” and “immigration” were examined. It therefore cannot lay claim to being comprehensive. Finally, this survey is not longitudinal and thus does not track changing patterns of representation during the five-year period examined. It is intended to instead to offer insight into broad trends evident in recent coverage.

Methodology

The Charlotte Observer and The News & Observer were chosen because they are North Carolina’s two largest newspapers. At the same time, both papers are published in cities that have experienced rapid growth in the Latino population: Indeed, from 1980 to 2000 the Raleigh-Durham area was the fastest growing Latino metro in the U.S. and

Charlotte ranked in fourth place (Furuseth & Smith, 2006, p. 8). The period surveyed was from November 27, 2002, to November 27, 2007. Relevant articles were identified using a keyword search on the America's Newspapers online database, which archives The Charlotte Observer and The News & Observer and describes itself as "the most comprehensive U.S. newspaper resource available."

The two keywords chosen for the search were "Hispanic" and "immigration." These keywords represent only two of numerous terms that could have been used to access articles with content related to Latino migration. Indeed, a significant limitation of the survey is that newspaper articles with other terms such as "Latino," "immigrant" or "migration" may have been overlooked. However, these two keywords were chosen strategically. "Hispanic" is the identifier used by most government agencies and, in turn, is often used in newspapers rather than the identifier "Latino." Furthermore, though "migration" more accurately describes the movement of Latinos into North Carolina, "immigration" is used more often in the media to describe this process.

In total, 740 articles were identified with this keyword search. A preliminary survey of 100 of these articles was performed to identify the main categories of coverage. Six main categories were identified: migration as a problem; immigration as a political issue; migration as a human rights issue; the large-scale and long-term impact of migration on North Carolina; personal glimpses into migrants' lives; and ways that migrants are remaking North Carolina's culture. Of course, the delineation of these categories was a subjective process. In the very act of deciding which categories will be coded, the researcher inevitably introduces his own personal experiences, ideology and particular research agenda.

Tankard's comments in the context of framing are applicable here: "coming up with the names for frames itself involves a kind of framing" (Tankard, 2003, p. 98).

Finally, the 740 articles were analyzed and assigned to one of the six categories. Editorials were not coded. Though editorials are an important part of newspaper coverage, they are generally understood to represent the opinions of particular authors and not a definitive account of the "truth" or "reality" of a situation. Again, as there was only one coder, this process was not intended as a rigorous content or framing analysis but rather a way of identifying broad patterns in coverage.

Findings

The great majority of coverage fit into the first four categories: migration as a problem; immigration as a political issue; migration as a human-rights issue; and the long-term impact. These articles present a generally depersonalized and negative view of migrants and migration. Far fewer articles fit into the final two categories: personal views of migrants' lives and ways that migrants are remaking North Carolina's culture.

From the population of articles, 145 address the problems and negative consequences of migration and the quest to eradicate these problems. One main theme is Latino migrants and links with criminality. An April 4, 2007, article in *The News & Observer* titled "Hispanic DWIs rooted in immigrants' culture," for instance, looks at high rates of drunk driving among Latinos (Maguire, p. A1). Other articles cover a string of high-profile fatalities involving Latinos driving drunk. The problems of identity theft, drug trafficking and prostitution among the Latino population also receive extensive treatment. A December 12, 2002, article in *The Charlotte Observer* titled "Drug traffic's newest wave," for example,

explains how new migrants are lured into an expanding drug trade in North Carolina with ties to Latin America (McDonald, p. A1).

Other articles in this category explore hostility and resistance to migration and cultural change in North Carolina. Thirteen articles focus on growing concerns about the use of Spanish in the state's schools and businesses. A May 23, 2007, article in *The News & Observer* titled "Merchants fight Spanish," profiles one local store owner who posted a sign outside his business that read, "Honk if you hate Spanish" (Oliver, p. B9). Another significant source of discontent is the unchecked growth of the illegal immigrant population. A September 12, 2003, article in *The News & Observer*, for instance, describes Congressional candidate Vernon Robinson's anti-immigration protest outside the Mexican Consulate in Raleigh (Stradling, p. A15).

Finally, nearly half of the articles in this category focus on efforts to crack down on undocumented immigration and discourage undocumented immigrants from settling in North Carolina. The 287(g) program – which authorizes local police to inquire into the immigration status of people stopped for other offenses, including traffic violations – has recently been implemented in counties throughout North Carolina and generated extensive coverage. In 2004, a North Carolina policy change barring undocumented immigrants from receiving driver's licenses triggered debate and spawned 18 articles. Another means of dealing with the undocumented population has been local ordinances designed to restrict access to housing, healthcare and other services. A December 10, 2006, article in *The Charlotte Observer* titled "How many is too many in a house?" examines a proposed law limiting maximum occupancies in residences that primarily affects new migrants living together to save money (Kelly, 1B). Finally, efforts to screen out undocumented workers –

including job raids by federal immigration officials and programs to verify employees' Social Security numbers – have emerged as another means of clamping down on immigration.

A second major area of coverage has been immigration as a political issue. A total of 89 articles examine ongoing efforts to reform federal legislation, popular response to these efforts and the use of immigration as a campaign tactic in state and federal elections. In the summer of 2007, a White House-backed bill to establish a guest worker program and provide avenues for the legalization of millions of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. was debated in Congress and ultimately scuttled. A May 9, 2007, article in *The News and Observer* tolls the death knell for the latest round of reforms: "Immigration bill not likely to be revived." Earlier efforts by President Bush to institute a guest-worker program to bring Mexicans to the U.S. legally also receive coverage in local papers. At the same time, 19 articles focus on massive immigrant rallies staged in spring 2006 in response to a controversial bill in Congress, known as H.R. 4437, which proposed new, stiffer penalties for illegal immigrants and anyone who aided them in the U.S.

Immigration also emerges in the context of campaign coverage. Twelve articles focus on the 2006 elections, where Democratic gains in the House of Representatives were attributed to massive Latino turnout and dissatisfaction with Republican policy. An October 18, 2006, article in *The News & Observer* titled "Attacks fly fast in 13th debate," for instance, examines Republican challenger Vernon Robinson's critique of Democratic incumbent Brad Miller's handling of the immigration issue in North Carolina (Christensen, p. B1). Latino immigration also figured prominently in the 2004 gubernatorial and presidential elections. A January 8, 2004, article in *The News & Observer* titled "Bush's proposal ticklish for the

GOP,” explains that pro-immigration policies in the White House hampered N.C. governor Mike Easley’s re-election campaign (Gardner, p. A10).

A third major area of migration coverage shifts focus from the problems and political issues associated with Latinos to examine abuses suffered by migrants in North Carolina. In total, 48 articles explore the vulnerability of Latino migrants in a variety of settings. Most of these articles concern unsafe and exploitive working conditions. A November 30, 2006, article in The Charlotte Observer titled “Group protests pork company” shows the hardships faced by migrants working in North Carolina’s Smithfield Foods plants (Dobbins, p. 8V). Other articles examine abuse of migrants by local police, employers who refused to pay their Latino guest workers, and telemarketing scams aimed at the Latino population. Sixteen articles highlight lack of access to basic services – including healthcare, insurance, unemployment benefits and personal security – among the Latino community.

The fourth major category of coverage looks at Latinos not as merely as an inconvenience, political issue or human rights problem but as a large-scale and long-term influence on North Carolina. In total, 106 articles explore how the Latino population is remaking the state’s classrooms, businesses, demographic profile and political context. Thirty-five of these articles chart the continuing evolution of the state’s population as both legal and illegal immigrants stream into North Carolina. An April 7, 2003, story in The News & Observer offers a frank assessment of the situation: “Immigrants drive growth of the Triangle” (Stradling, p. A1). Other articles forecast the lasting impact of migration in years to come. A March 18, 2004, article from The Charlotte Observer titled “Minorities will rise to half of population” explains that by 2050 whites will be in the minority and Latinos will account for one in four Americans (Armas, p. 11A). Many of these articles also work to

move beyond numbers and begin filling in the outlines of the new Latino population. A September 23, 2007, story in *The News & Observer* titled “Myths, facts about N.C. Hispanics,” for example, notes that new migrants are more affluent and more educated than previously thought (Collins, p. A17).

In this same category, 40 articles describe the growing economic impact of North Carolina’s Latinos, both for better and for worse. While some articles report declining wages and increased competition as the result of migration, others describe Latinos as a new and important market, a source of tax revenue and a motor behind the continued growth of the construction industry. Other articles focus on where North Carolina’s Latinos are and are not spending their income. An April 29, 2006, article in *The News & Observer* titled “Boycott pushes shutdowns,” for instance, explains that Latino walk-outs in the wake of controversial new immigration laws have hurt local businesses’ productivity (p. 9A). Likewise, a November 28, 2003, story in *The Charlotte Observer* titled “Charlotte Latinos send more cash home,” describes the growing importance of remittances sent back to Latin American countries (Bolling, p. 1A)

Other articles in this category examine the impact of Latinos on schools and politics in North Carolina. Latino students account for more than half of the growth in North Carolina’s public school classrooms in the past five years, and 21 articles have documented growing numbers of ESL (English as a Second Language) students, high drop-out rates among Latinos and the increase in Latino enrollment at North Carolina’s universities. A June 6, 2004, article in *The Charlotte Observer* titled “Colleges adjust to rise in Hispanic students,” for example, shows how universities are working to recruit Latino scholars (Holmes, p. 4B). Finally, 10 articles explain the growing political weight of the Latino

electorate. An August 29, 2004, article in The Charlotte Observer titled “Number of Latino voters surge” notes that area politicians are increasingly courting the Latino vote (Bolling, p. 1B).

Overall, then, coverage of Latino migration in North Carolina’s two largest newspapers concentrates on migrants as problems, the political debate over immigration, human rights questions, and the long-term impact of migration on North Carolina. While the total number of articles may be large, this breakdown shows the breadth of coverage to be narrow in key respects. Coverage focuses on Latino migration as an oftentimes pernicious and nearly always alien influence. Even those articles that weigh the impact of migration on North Carolina – as opposed to simply relating strategies to minimize it – conceive of Latinos as an outside force acting on the state, rather than an integral piece of the state’s identity. As a result, large areas of the Latino migrant experience are underrepresented.

Few articles, for instance, focus on the private dramas of migration: the day to day experience of being a Latino migrant in North Carolina as seen through a migrant’s eyes. Only a handful of stories (2 percent) look at the struggles of individual migrants to get to the U.S., adapt to a new life here or cope with the pressures of living an undocumented lifestyle. An October 2006 series in The Charlotte Observer titled “What will happen to Kayla?” for example, focuses on a young child’s plight after the arrest of her undocumented mother (Coto, p. 1A). Likewise, “Starting over in North Carolina,” a December 16, 2002, article in The News & Observer, examines the life of Colombian refugee Edgar Acosta (Headrick, p. A1). These, however, are exceptions to the normal pattern of coverage.

Similarly, stories examining how migrants have fundamentally remade – rather than simply invaded – North Carolina’s culture are rare. 30 stories equate migration with cultural

enrichment; however, most of these treat Latino culture as an adornment or embellishment rather than a central feature of North Carolina. A September 17, 2006, article from The News & Observer titled, “A fiesta for the hometown crowd,” for example, describes Latino culture in terms of ethnic food and dress (Arounnarath, p. A1). Examples of how Latino culture is reshaping North Carolina are harder to find. A February 8, 2004, article from The Charlotte Observer titled “Library’s Latino offerings increase,” for example, hints how one central cultural institution in North Carolina – the public library – is evolving. Likewise, a January 16, 2005, article from The News & Observer titled “From minority to mainstream” examines the growing number of Latino migrants who have grown up in the state and whose blend of Southern and Latin American culture represents the future of North Carolina (Martinez, p. A27).

Conclusions

Coverage of Latino migration in North Carolina’s two largest newspapers – The Charlotte Observer and The News & Observer – generally corresponds to patterns observed in scholarly literature on the representation of Latinos nationally and in North Carolina. Latinos are generally shown as passive, as outsiders and as problem people, and few articles challenged these portrayals by showing the personal drama of the migrant experience or by exploring ways that migration is fundamentally changing North Carolina. This project aims to help fill in these gaps. Through a series of five feature articles, it attempts to show the evolving and increasingly central place of Latinos in North Carolina and the personal – and oftentimes difficult – transition of newcomers to permanent settlers.

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